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**SOME THOUGHTS  
ON  
HILAIRE BELLOC**  
**By PATRICK BRAYBROOKE**

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SOME THOUGHTS ON  
HILAIRE BELLOC



BY THE SAME AUTHOR

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G. K. CHESTERTON



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# SOME THOUGHTS ON HILAIRE BELLOC

By PATRICK BRAYBROOKE

*Author of "G. K. Chesterton," "Suggestive Fragments,"  
"Oddments," etc.*

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
SIR CHARLES F. HIGHAM

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## *Foreword*

Many of us have a point of view. Some of us express it. Few, however, know much about anything. Mr. Braybrooke is a sound journalist. He has a singular capacity for only writing about men he has studied from every angle. His impressions of G. K. Chesterton proved that. His criticisms of Mr. Belloc's works and his study of the man, is timely. The more we know about him, the better we appreciate or understand what he writes. I welcome these "thoughts" and believe they should be and will be, widely read.

CHARLES F. HIGHAM.



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## *Dedication*

*I dedicate this book to those who have crossed my path, to those who have passed on over the hills to the land from which none return, to the land that lies just beyond the sun. I dedicate it to that land which in the eve of a summer day seems so near, which in the gloom of a winter's day seems so far. I dedicate this book last but not least to those who have written books and have long ago laid down the pen.*

*Likewise I dedicate it to Betty and Neville two passers-by.*



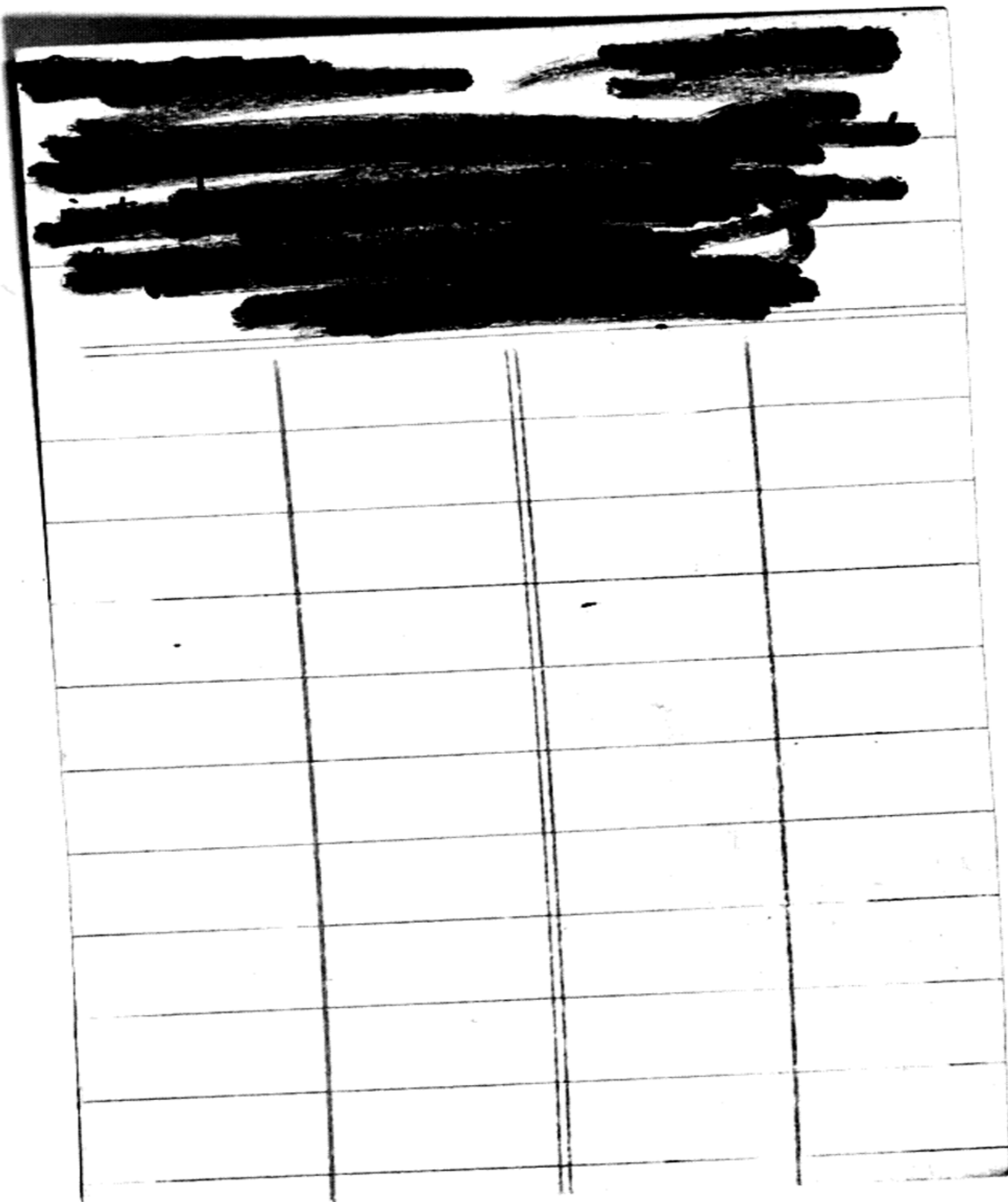
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PATRICK BRAYBROOKE.

## *Preface*

The other day rummaging among my books I came across a thin looking volume which I regret to say had a plentiful supply of dust. Looking at the inscription on the cover I discovered it to be an early book of verses by Mr. Chesterton which purported to be a series of Biographies written in verse. Amongst them was one that dealt with Mr. Hilaire Belloc. And this is what I read :

“ Mr. Hilaire Belloc  
Is a case for legislation ad hoc,  
He seems to think nobody minds  
His books being all different kinds.”

I have endeavoured in this book about Mr. Belloc to deal with his different kinds of books. Those who know them will I hope perhaps get to know them better, those who do not know them I trust will be inspired to become acquainted with them. As a newspaper man I have given first place to Mr. Belloc's attitude to the Press. More nonsense is talked and written about that body than perhaps any other with the exception of The Church. I have considered Mr. Belloc as a politician, as a theologian, as an anti-Jew, as an historian of



The French Revolution, as a writer of Essays and as a lover of Sussex. I have also added a chapter on Mr. Belloc as he is to-day. The book has been written in those intervals when I have not been interviewing men and women on questions from the cause of cancer to matters of nether limbs of revue actresses; it has been written when after dinner speeches have convinced me that proposers of toasts know the art of lying; it has been written with the midnight oil, with the mid-day sun; it has been written when I knew that the precious "copy" was safe in the gentle but provoking hands of the Sub-Editor.

PATRICK BRAYBROOKE.

Fleet Street, 1923.

## *Chapter One*

### MR. BELLOC AND THE PRESS

**I** CANNOT conceive of a more admirable title for Mr. Belloc's book on the Press, than that he should call it "The Free Press," for were we to take his standpoint there would no doubt be a Free Press that would leave three quarters of the population without newspapers ; because they would not be read !

I suppose really the reason that Belloc is so angry with the newspapers is that they do not agree with what he thinks would be an admirable thing ; which is, quite frankly, that they should not be controlled by those arch villains the proprietors, yet we have an uneasy feeling that Belloc would not refuse to be one if he had the chance.

In this chapter I shall endeavour to discover in what precise directions the subject of this Essay bases his attacks on the Press, having ascertained this I shall endeavour to see as a member of that august body how far he may be right, how far he may be wrong. Whether an outsider as Mr. Belloc is, in regard to " Fleet Street," has any conceivable right to criticise the Press is not a question I am concerned with, he has done so and I am concerned to agree or disagree with his conclusions.



It is of course quite imperative that we shall try and discover what he means by the Free Press and we discover without a great deal of difficulty that it was summed up in two papers which were called *The New Age* and *The New Witness* and unfortunately for Mr. Belloc they have both died the death they deserved. With *The New Age* I have no quarrel, it attempted to do things and it failed, *The New Witness* did little of importance and quite deservedly it also has disappeared. Yet for Mr. Belloc these are the acme of what the Press should be. Why? Because they were both so small, so insignificant, so obviously party, in spite of being said to be free that in no sense were they newspapers at all, they were merely organs of a certain opinion dictated by Messrs. Belloc and Chesterton, and a host of lesser and less able satellites.

The Free Press then really is nothing of the sort ; it prints what it likes, but the " it " must agree with Belloc.

Commenting on the growth of the Press from what we may call the days of the News sheets to the great controls of to-day, Belloc sees in this three characteristics which he dislikes and which we must examine in some detail. They are

Firstly : " that it falls into the hands of a very few rich men and nearly always men of base origin and capacities.

Secondly : It is in their hands a mere commercial enterprise.

Thirdly : It is economically supported by advertisers who can in part control it."

Of course the criticism that the ownership of the larger newspapers is in the hands of a few rich men is true, it is obvious that in these days when one paper is out to cut the throat of its next door neighbour, when Editors are largely concerned to contradict the news of the other journal, when competition in Fleet Street is on a scale never before contemplated, when the printing machines turn out a million or more copies daily, that money and rich men must be behind the press.

I cannot see any alternative whatever, we may sigh that it is so but every big concern to-day is in the hands of a few, the great commercial enterprises that sell needles and motor-cars are under a few, the army is governed by a few generals who call themselves a general council or an army council, the Church which Mr. Belloc declares is so pure and free from greed is under a few spiritual magnates who dictate its policy, the press then cannot expect to be governed by any but a few wealthy men.

But it is grossly unfair to suggest that the average newspaper proprietor is a man of low origin and capacity, more often than not they are extremely intelligent and painstaking men. There is not I think need that they shall be, in the strict sense, journalists, so long as they do not interfere unduly with their Editors.

But really the reason that Mr. Belloc dislikes the idea of the wealthy proprietor is purely a personal one which is of course that he thinks it interferes with the freedom of the Press. Does it?



I am aware in attempting to answer such a question as this that I am treading on thin ice, because if I declare that proprietorship by the wealthy is not desirable I am saying quite plainly that the trend of the modern newspaper is towards a base that is not satisfactory, on the other hand if I disagree with Belloc and suggest that the press directed by the few is desirable, then I must substantiate my position.

But I shall adopt for the moment the Aristotelian mean and hold that as the press is, proprietorship by capitalists is inevitable which is to say that if we agree with Mr. Belloc as to the undesirability of such ownership then we have got to have a different kind of Press which to me is unthinkable. The only alternative would appear to me (as Mr. Belloc of course wants), a number of small independent journals which he fondly imagines will be the Free Press. So they will be no doubt ; but, and this is most important, they will in no sense be newspapers but far more than at present, the monopoly of their respective owners.

I contend therefore that as things are at present the ownership of the press by wealthy men is not only desirable but to my mind inevitable, the machinery behind the average newspaper demands that the financial purse directing it shall be large, the very fact of the world collection of news is expensive, most men on the better papers are of such standing that they require and deserve large salaries, a proprietor must be ever ready to put his hand to

his purse when there is no certainty of profit but just the chance of holding on.

Once let us get rid of these so-called capitalists and we shall see the spectacle of no policy whatever or nothing to guide public opinion, merely the hateful position of being dictated to by small concerns which though possibly free, will be nothing better than parish magazines.

The second point that very much annoys Belloc is that these proprietors merely look upon their controls as commercial enterprises whereas he would no doubt have them set up as philanthropists and scorn the very word circulation, with the vehemence that the Religious Press scorns the word charity.

Yet it would be quite inconceivable that proprietors should not look upon their controls in a commercial light, added to which it must be recognised that to-day that which is backed by commercial considerations induces the greatest enthusiasm, I am certain that to look upon a newspaper as a commercial concern is one of the surest ways of making that journal a "live" one, it stimulates those who have the actual production to know that there is money in it, the public are likely to be considered as it is quite obvious that if a proprietor wishes to make his paper commercially successful, he will put what is palatable or perhaps rather, that which is interesting, before them. But if a proprietor merely looked upon his control as an interest the wishes of the public would not have much chance of being met.

And another reason that it is good that proprietors should look upon their newspapers commercially is that it enables them to be cheap enough to be bought by a wide public, the public that buys the so-called Free Press Periodicals is so small, so numerically insignificant that it is little more than a local band of supporters.

I must pass on to the third main contention Belloc has which makes him sigh for the Free Press and it is the only one I find myself in any agreement with at all, it is of course quite simply that advertisers rule a newspaper with a tyranny that only those who know Fleet Street can in any way realise. It is to the ordinary man perfectly incredible how much of a newspaper's policy is dictated by the fear that advertisements will be lost. Mr. Belloc quotes a homely example of how if a journalist hates patent medicine, he must reserve that hatred to himself if a large firm of patent medicine makers happen to advertise with the newspaper for which he works. I could of my own experience quote scores of instances when I have had to be careful and keep back a good "story" for fear that the advertisement manager may find that Messrs. Smith and Jones have ceased to advertise.

This system of monopoly by advertising is the curse of the press, far more than even Belloc imagines, it cripples the accuracy of news, the attention of abuses, the unmasking of scoundrels, it poisons the journalists mind, it fills the Editor in his sanctum with dread every time the post comes, it causes the advertising departments to



view with suspicion every effort of those on the editorial side to write things as they are. If there is one thing that cripples the freedom of journalists it is the sword of the Damoclean advertiser; the power of the proprietor is as nothing compared to it.

To sum up the main arguments of Belloc then against the press I agree only with his third position, the monopoly of the advertiser. That the proprietors of papers must be rich is to me inevitable, it is to me satisfactory, that they are commercially minded is I think good. Mr. Belloc has really only one good argument to bring against the press which is the advertising tyranny and he brings it in, in quite the wrong place as though it had not the importance of the other two arguments. I can assure him he is wrong, he must place himself in the News Room in any great paper, he must see a glaring wrong, he must be told by his Editor, "don't see this, the firm advertises," then he may realise that while advertisers wield the power they do to-day the press is really shackled, but it is no use to put the blame in the wrong quarters.

Yet in spite of his pessimism Mr. Belloc comes to the conclusion that the Free Press will come, that we shall see the end of large newspaper controls, that we shall see journals springing up in a night as flowers after the spring rain and why is he so hopeful? Simply because the opposite press to his ideal (the Free Press) provides no food for the mind; an absolutely admirable position, if true. The work of the

press is really to provide news, not to instruct. I deplore the fact that to-day so many of our leading newspapers are merely magazines with news put in to fill up space.

Again Belloc feels that the independent organs are so powerful that in time the whole press will have to be run on the same lines. I cannot agree with him, I cannot see that the press can be entirely free, it must have a policy, it must have a standpoint, the only real way of getting a Free Press would be a National One run by the state which would really simply be an official organ to give news of the world, yet the problem would not be settled, the National Press would in time come to have an outlook, it would be controlled.

I cannot see any indication that a Free Press as Mr. Belloc would have is possible or desirable, I am aware that the Press is far from perfect, that at times apart from advertising, it is purely governed by the policy of its proprietor, yet taking everything into consideration the British Press to-day is singularly accurate and easily the best expression of journalism in the world.

## *Chapter Two*

### THE JEWS

**L**ATELY it has been quite evident to any student of Belloc that he has been going under a complete change. From being in the true sense a literary man, he has gone round to the position of a political propagandist, or rather he has acquired sudden and severe attacks of panic. It is unfortunately rather a trend of our literature to-day that many of its leading writers assume to themselves the right of solving or attempting to, international or social questions. Thus Chesterton is bound to talk about divorce, he must interfere with Birth Control, Belloc must set out to solve the Jewish problem ; and in this chapter I shall deal with his method.

It is obviously no good beating about the bush, it is no good suggesting that Mr. Belloc is not in earnest, that his book is merely a brilliant exposition of a problem, we must be frank and state that there is no shadow of doubt that Belloc sees in the Jews the gravest national menace, he pictures them as a cancer eating into the body, he sees them acquiring wealth, he sees them responsible for the revolution in Russia and



he wants them to go and as soon as possible. Such is the position, we must examine his data in some detail.

One of the main contentions of the book is that in some mysterious way the Jews wherever their temporary resting place, manage to keep unimpaired their national characteristics ; with the obvious result that as a race they are not able to blend with other races. The logical conclusion then is of course that other nations cannot blend with them. Antagonism then is unavoidable between Jew and Non-Jew. It is what Mr. Belloc calls one "of the general causes of friction," this inability to really fit in. Personally I do not think the Jew can help this, I do not think he can become de-nationalised ; I believe in some indefinable way he is always different to the Gentile.

Let us proceed then with Mr. Belloc to what, with admirable diction, he calls "the special causes which nourish and exasperate the inevitable friction between the Jewish race and its Hosts." Could there be anything more abominable to a nation's dignity than to be in the perpetual position of the guest of, if not a hostile, at least an ungenial host ? Such a thing as this I think entirely escapes Mr. Belloc's notice. But to place on paper the "special causes of friction," they are according to the subject of this study two. Firstly "The Jewish Reliance on Secrecy," Secondly "The Expression of Superiority by the Jew."

The morality of secrecy is an interesting

problem, it very much depends on motive, the motive of the jewel thief to keep his movements secret are discretion and fear, those of the general who keeps the movements of his troops secret are discretion and judgment, the motive of the Jew in secrecy is probably fear, fear of hostility, fear of contempt, fear of irritation. But as Mr. Belloc so ably points out this peculiar characteristic of the Jews is fatal to them, it breeds suspicion, it is a confession really of a feeling of inferiority, though I do not think any Jew would admit this, it is a slight on a tradition that many may sneer at, but few could excel if equal. I fully agree with Mr. Belloc the widespread hatred this secret policy causes, but I am not so sure that it is always through fear that such a policy is dictated. It is more paying to be Mr. Moss of Surbiton than Mr. Moses of the same delectable suburb, we would rather deal with Mr. Benson of Wimbledon than Mr. Benjamin of Hackney ; yet of course such is really a very strong argument for this secrecy of the Jews. This secrecy of the Jews is entirely the fault of the non-Jews, this I think Belloc makes quite clear, yet of course he is the first to admit that by the use of such a policy the Jews are cutting their own throats.

The second " friction " is a very difficult one, it is the question of the Jew feeling superior to the Non-Jew. Here I do not think Belloc gets at all to the root of the matter, he *suggests* it may be a feeling engineered by religious history, he *suggests* it may be that after thousands of years

of persecution the Jews have survived, but he does not give us any definite answer to the problem. Perhaps in this he is wise but I am inclined to think that the fact that the Jews were the Chosen Race is the real solution of the matter.

Why they were the Chosen Race is no part of our enquiry, the fact that they were, is for me, sufficient to warrant that feeling of superiority, in the Jew, Mr. Belloc so much deplores.

I have of course suggested above, that one of the reasons for the secret policy of the Jews was that they were a little ashamed of being such, yet I have here said that I thought the most likely reason for their alleged attitude of superiority was to be found in their mysterious calling by God to be the Chosen Race.

There is no incongruity in the two statements ; both of which are borne out by Mr. Belloc, but Nations have to a certain extent made the Jews feel that they are inferior, but at deadrock every pious and proper Jew knows that by his Divine calling he is of a superior race to the rest of the Nations.

We have therefore so far seen the contention of Belloc that the Jews to-day are nothing more than a national menace, this we are not prepared to dispute with him, we have examined his arguments for the antipathy of the Non-Jew for the Jew and we have discovered it to be of two sources, The Secret Policy of The Jews and their Feeling of Superiority, while more generally we have found that the hostility to the Jew lies



in the fact that he keeps his characteristics whether in China or Whitechapel or in the vast regions of Russia.

With these four points clear before us it will be well to see at once how far we are in agreement with Belloc. In the main we find ourselves so far at one with him but we are inclined to think that he rather tries to boil down the hatred for the Jew into too component parts. It is a regrettable thing to have to acknowledge it but Belloc does not see even faintly the universal hatred there is for the Jew by the Gentile, he really does not do more than touch on the fringe of the problem. With this inborn hatred for the Jew it is well to consider, how can Christianity faced by such a dilemma ever make any headway ; how can we reconcile the mission of The Catholic Church of which Belloc is so proud, when giving Divinity to its Founder, she, at the same time would in many of her followers, deny to Christ as Jew, the right to live ? Such grave sides of the anti-Jewish question Belloc passes by, we do not wish to say he has shirked them, but we would suggest that the political side of the Jewish problem important as it is, is not paramount.

With the problem before us, with the Belloc contentions of Anti-Jew, we turn to examine the solution he gives us for meeting the difficulty. It will be as well to state it and then criticise it. It is of course that the Jews shall be segregated and become once more a nation. This of course sounds (as it is meant to), easy, but it is very far from that in practice.

We have then to consider the interesting solution of the Jewish problem that Belloc puts forward, that they shall once again be gathered together from the corners of the earth.

But has he really seriously considered what this implies? In the very first place it implies a direct contradiction to his great implied contention that the Non-Jewish peoples hate the Jewish people. To form a separate nation of them would mean that some existing nation has got to allow them space in the real meaning of the word, where is it to be? not in England, not in America, not in Russia, certainly not in Palestine, nowhere apparently unless it be at the South or North Poles. Not only has some existing nation got to allow them space, it would have to give sympathy to the Jew, it must keep them while they become a nation, a nation cannot be made by metaphorically picking up a million people on a magic carpet and transferring them to an uninhabited island, though it may be true in time such a method may produce a separate nation, but the process will be slow. It would be impossible while the nations hate the Jews as we are told by Belloc they do. And for the part of the Jews will they be content to be packed off like a lot of naughty schoolboys and told to be good, will they with cheers gather from all parts of the world to start their model nation rather on the lines of Letchworth Garden city, will they be content to be a separate nation and only to be national never international, would Belloc suggest that this separate nation

be surrounded with barbed wire so that none could escape, so that the other nations could look on and see the segregated nation never expanding, never growing bigger always looked upon as a sort of settlement of dangerous lunatics? On the face of it the Belloc proposal is ridiculous, there is no conceivable chance of the Jews becoming a separate nation while hostility to them is rampant among the peoples of the world.

Apart from the general problem which we have been considering there is another which has brought matters to a head, it has caused Belloc to write this book, it has given a topical turn to the situation, and it is the part the Jewish "nation" in Russia has played in introducing Bolshevism. Before looking at this question as Belloc sees it, let us be quite frank and admit that Bolshevism to-day is a failure, it is a mistaken policy, it is tyranny when it was meant to be liberty, but when it was conceived it was a different thing, it was I believe a conception that Russia was too much under a tyranny of Capitalism. That the Jews were the originators of Bolshevism I am in agreement with, that they were solely responsible for its misapplication I am not so convinced about.

It is for Belloc "a Jewish movement against Industrial Capitalism." To go further Belloc contends to-day "there are two and only two organized international forces in Europe with a soul, one is The Catholic Church and the other is Jewry, of the two the Jews



alone could act," this they did because "these Jews who have destroyed what we know of Russia were undoubtedly possessed of a political ideal: the ideal then of Communism." Then I think what I have indicated is borne out by Belloc; the Jews were the originators of a movement in Russia which sought to impose communism; but which failing has resulted in anarchy, atheism, and tyranny worse than the tyranny of the Russian monarchy, but they cannot I think be blamed for this. Though we may dislike Communism, that dislike is very largely fostered because it has never been successfully tried or rather an attempt of its application has always been accompanied by Revolution. I think this argument of Belloc that the Jewish menace has come to a head through Bolshevism breaks down when we consider that after all it has not been yet proved bad for the world if Communism were to be tried. What Belloc sees is the failure of it, he sees that the Jews were the originators of the movement but he bases his conclusion on the state of Russia to-day, a state I firmly believe the Jews did not have as their ideal.

On these grounds I hesitate to admit that the Russian upheaval is a potent argument against the Jew, I hesitate to think that Belloc is right in being so angry about the Jew in Russia, I am not sure that it would not be a good thing to try Communism, at any rate I cannot agree that the Jews are a world menace because they tried the experiment in Russia, those who dislike

Communism base their arguments largely on the spectacle of a Pseudo Communism. I do not say that it would be the best thing to have Jewish Communism, I hold that it is unfair to call the Jews a menace because they tried it.

I cannot see that in any way Belloc has proved that the Jews are becoming or have become a menace. He admits in the case of Russia, the revolutionary movement was organised as *a* Jewish move, not a move of *the* Jewish Nation, it is not the same in other ways, what people who fear the Jews imagine, and to a very large extent Belloc is of their number, is that when the Jews do anything they act with a solidarity no other people could conceive of doing. Nothing can be so mistaken, nothing can give rise to such misunderstanding as this ; were the Jews throughout the world to always in some way act uniformly then indeed Belloc might have cause to fear the menace of their power, but it is not so, more than most peoples by their very dispersed condition, the Jews have no conceivable chance of acting in unison even if they wished. I feel very strongly that apart from as I have said, the nonsense of Belloc in desiring segregation for them, such a move would be the most likely to bring about the problem he fears so, and which he so miserably fails to solve.

Really although he tries to conceal it, Belloc's chief dislike of the Jews is that he is intensely Catholic and therefore naturally Anti-Jewish.

To sum up then ; I think that Belloc's book on the Jews while interesting is full of faulty

arguments, he is frightened of the Jews, he wants to get rid of them, his method if adopted would be disastrous.

In a few words I would plead for a better understanding of the Jews, I would plead that the Jew is a man who wants to live his life out in peace, I would suggest as the Jew is constituted, as history has pictured him, in some way he is better to be scattered among the nations. I would ask the nations to give to the Jew full citizenship while allowing for their peculiar characteristics, I would ask the Churches to consider the position, to remember their Founder was a Jew, I would urge upon them that it is more necessary to make the Jew Christian than to quarrel about Episcopacy or The Virgin Birth.

For I would urge that though there are in the world Jew and Gentile, a very great philosopher once said, that "In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile." The problem is not only political, it is far deeper ; it is Theological.



## *Chapter Three*

### THE FAITH AND MR. BELLOC

**I**N dealing with a question of this character it is of course evident that we are going to sail not only on very controversial ground, but in very deep waters, if we may use a metaphor slightly imaginary. For in the first place there will not only be no general agreement for many people, with Belloc's book, but the question of what the Faith is will be a question that will evoke much controversy.

It must be clearly understood that when we say we do not agree with Belloc as to the advantage of a return to the Catholic Faith, we mean the Roman Catholic Faith as taught by the Roman Catholic Church, of which Church Belloc is so firm an apologist.

We in this chapter are of course not going to enter into any particular discussion as to what the Faith is, we are content to believe that Belloc is right when he means by the Faith, that which is the body of Catholic doctrine, what we have to do is to see whether with such a standpoint his main contentions seem to be true.

It will then be obviously necessary to state at once what these are, generally speaking the

principal arguments of "Europe and The Faith" are that European civilisation has been made by The Catholic Faith, that the Reformation set up two distant cultures or methods of religion, and that the future of Europe depends entirely on a whole hearted return to the Catholic Faith. Each of these contentions we propose to examine in this chapter.

The first question of course at once opens up the interesting question of the relationship between religion and civilisation, Belloc holds firmly that with the coming of the Catholic Church in the first century the Roman Empire began to be established on a firm civilised basis which increased in the fourth century when Constantine became, though in a very limited sense, a Christian, or rather a holder of the recognised religion.

From the old religion how did this Catholic Faith differ, because if we are to understand how in any way Europe has been moulded by the Faith, we must get at the bed rock of this differentiation.

"It differed from all around it in this that it proposed statement instead of hypothesis, affirmed concrete historical facts instead of suggesting myths and treated its ritual of "mysteries" as realities instead of symbols."

Generally then this Catholic religion replaced theory by practice, it laid down rules of conduct, it taught of the immortality of the soul, perhaps the one thing that gave such power to this new

religion, it told of a Man who was God, who founded a Society or Church that was to be the means of making the best of men. It is then on these grounds that we agree with Belloc when he states that European Civilisation has been made by the Catholic Church. Naturally when we say civilisation, we mean as it is practised under Catholic rules of conduct, not when as to-day every man and every nation in Europe is inclined to try that which is for the moment new.

To come to the next question Belloc of course views the Reformation from the angle of Catholicism, it is therefore to be expected that he will be very largely against the supposition that the Reformation was other than detrimental, detrimental to the undividing of culture, detrimental to the unbroken career of the Catholic Church, detrimental to the fundamentals of the Faith. But he will not see that the Reformation was really entirely caused by the failure of the Catholic Church to carry out her sacred duties, for duties ecclesiastical she substituted "duties" political, for the Will of God she sought the will of kings and men, it was then not improbable that men would waver and try a new order of things, in other words a reformation.

It is rather a characteristic of Belloc that he does not see the other side, or rather if he does, he sees it through such coloured spectacles that his judgment is not always very valuable. It is rather so in this book, to take his general attitude to this vexed question of the Reformation; he sees the Reformation from the



Catholic side and while he is not oblivious to the fact that the Catholic Church had to blame herself a good deal for the upheaval, yet he cannot but insist that all the arguments advanced by Protestants are false and faked. This is a very illogical position to take up and Belloc has made a mistake. But without further delay we must at once turn to what he says of this great event that altered the status of the Church, that cut in two the culture of Europe that really was a very sound argument that at any rate in some ways the Catholic Church had failed.

It would be interesting to enquire what are the causes that make a Church fail, probably one of the chief would be that it becomes worldly, becomes concerned with temporal power rather than with spiritual power, becomes political when it should be above such temporalities. In the time of the Reformation the Catholic Church as Belloc so ably points out, fell into evil ways, it forgot its true mission, it became political and worldly, "its every institution grew debased or formal, the lethargy, avarice and routine from which the Church suffered had decayed at the close of the Middle Ages, there was a popular loss of faith."

Then generally I think that we may take it that Belloc is perfectly aware of the shortcomings of the Catholic Church; from this general position, he goes on with some inconsequence to state some of the particular reasons for the split, they seem to him as a Catholic

trivial, to a Protestant they would seem immense, so immense that they would quite well account for the violent action against the existing religion, the ordinary man who would be neither Catholic or Protestant except perhaps nominally, would see in them theological wrangling, a spectacle as old as the hills and as permanent.

Of these particular positions "shall I give an example"? asks Belloc. We will let him do so.

Thus he says "One of the most popular forms which the protest took, was what I have just mentioned, a demand for Communion in both kinds and for the restoration of what was in many places ancient custom, the drinking from the cup after the Priest. Here is another example. Prominent among the later expressions of discontent you have the Adamites who among other tenets rejected clothes upon the more solemn occasions of their ritual and went naked; there is yet another historical feature which it is of the utmost importance to seize if we are to understand what followed; for it was a feature common to all European thought until a long time after the final establishment of permanent cleavage in Europe. That feature is this: No one in the Reformation dreamt a divided Christendom to be possible."

There are then I think apart from the general corruption of the Catholic Church three reasons that Belloc suggests urged the Reformation, the first is the theological one, the wish for a different

form of Communion, the second is the rise of violent heresy emphasised by outbursts of maniacal conduct, the third a feeling of security in the permanence of the Church leading to a disappointing disillusionment.

It will then be thought at first sight how broad minded is Belloc, how noble it is of him to give such prominence to defects in an institution to which he professes such strong allegiance, how courageous of him to invoke the angers of Rome by a denouncement of the not altogether God-like or pure history of that See. But here is a strange inconsistency, having said that the Catholic Church, that is the expression of the Catholic Faith, is not all that it might be, in fact having hinted that a reformation was not only inevitable but nearly desirable, he suddenly turns round on the Protestant reformers and says they have destroyed the Faith, they have split Europe in twain, they have caricatured the Pope, they have split over trivial matters as the administration of the Holy Sacrament, they have instead, instituted a local Church, (that is of course the Anglican Church), they have broken the succession from St. Peter. This then is the position. Belloc sees that his beloved Faith and Church were not all that they should be, he sees as I have said the need of Reform but when it came, and I think prevented the total degradation of the Catholic Faith, he is angry, vexed and sad.

My own view of the Reformation is that much as one regrets the reasons that made it necessary,



one is thankful that it came before the miserable spectacle appeared before the world of a fallen Church, a Christ crucified not on a Cross of wood but on a Cross of political ambition and spiritual sloth. On this ground I think Belloc is unfair in not mentioning that if the Catholic Church failed as she did, the Protestant Reformation was (to many Catholics) the lesser of two evils.

But he utterly refuses to even give the Protestants the benefit of the doubt in any way, he will not even allow that their leaders were any more than insincere agitators, thus he speaks of Martin Luther a man who at least was not a fool, he was "a voice but no leader" yet mark the Belloc typical inconsistency "had he never lived, the great bursting wave would have crashed onward much the same" therefore why does he go out of the way to denounce Martin Luther? there is of course but one explanation Belloc wishes to conceal what a large part really Luther played in the Reformation, what a large number of his followers to-day will have none of the trickery of Rome.

Before then I turn to examine my third contention that Belloc only sees hope for the world, in a return to the Catholic Faith let me just briefly sum up what we have said of this book "Europe and The Faith."

It is a plea that the whole of European civilisation in its essentials has been a product of the coming of the Catholic Faith, this is a position I entirely agree with, it is further that the

Reformation split the unity of the cultures of Europe and England and set up a local church ; this I have dealt with already in sufficient detail, I have said that over the Reformation Belloc is narrow minded and illogical. I now propose to agree with him that a return to the Catholic Faith is necessary but I insist that it must not be a return to *his* faith, which is really the Roman Form of Catholicism as distinct from the Early Church as Anglo-Catholicism to-day is also, as also is nonconformity and the Greek Orthodox Church.

Of course Belloc is very apt at leaving out of an argument anything that might make his case at all weak, I will take one example, possibly a trivial one, but at least suggestive. I have said that Belloc does not think very much of Martin Luther, he is angry with him because he helped the reformation, but he is very careful to make no mention of the most potent fact that led Luther to break with the Catholic Faith. It was that Luther was thoroughly disgusted with the sale of Indulgences, those frauds even to-day sanctioned by the Roman Catholic Church a cheap and disgraceful means of abstracting money from ignorant people by deluding them with promises nothing short of blasphemous. It is enough ; this example shows us how untrustworthy as a theologian Belloc is, how he cannot state a case fairly when he is defending his own belief, how he glosses over the real causes of the Reformation and only mentions the general ones both sides admit.

To come to what is of course the most important part of his book that is that "Europe must return to the Faith or she must perish."

I think that all men however diverse their beliefs whether they be Rationalists, Spiritualists, Theosophists, or of the Churches will sigh that in the world there is nothing to-day that can in any sense be called the Faith, rather it is there but none practise it, it is watered down to suit individual taste, it is added to for political ambition, it is made a cheap thing, it is entirely denied as unproven. But I say all men and all women in their heart of hearts must be sorry, they must sigh with Belloc for the Faith. But to-day what is the Faith? it is not Catholicism, it is not Modernism at Cambridge, it is not Anglicanism at All Saints' Margaret Street, it is not Spiritualism, it is not Rationalism, it is that simple Faith that once the Early Church held, that Faith that with the passing of the centuries has become distorted in every fashion.

But to come down to the particular, when Belloc says a return must be made to the Faith, he means to the Catholic Faith, and of course here he means the Roman Catholic Faith. God forbid that as practised to-day the Faith of that Church should ever become widespread, let the Churches tear out the anomalies that have crept in, let them substitute saints for over paid bishops, let them have a priesthood that can marry.

To-day there is no Catholic Church but there is a Catholic Faith, it is there as it was once



given by God in Christ ; the Churches have thought fit to destroy it, so that thinking men must hold it mystically, but the days are coming when the world must break down the Churches as they are and turn once again to the Faith that Christ is God and the sign is the Name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Ghost, then once more " Europe will be the Faith and the Faith will be Europe." To such a condition all sane men would pray.

## *Chapter Four*

### MR. BELLOC AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

THERE are broadly speaking two ways by which human progress can be obtained. The first is by Revolution, the second is by Evolution. The former may achieve results with rapidity and precision, but the latter will achieve more though it be by a slower process.

The French Revolution in a sense was a process of evolution that led from the fall of the French Monarchy to the establishing of a Republic, not a mere country governed by a president instead of a king, but a people that gradually came to make government a vastly different thing to what it had been.

In this chapter I hope to show what is Belloc's position with regard to this Revolution. To do this I shall examine the data he gives us which he believes lit the match, I shall then consider his actual account of the progress of the Revolution, next I shall endeavour to see his attitude to the military aspect of the conflict, finally I shall with some detail examine his position with regard to the Catholic Church and the Revolution.

According to Belloc the French Revolution was based on a distinct and uncompromising political theory. It was, he tells us "that a political community pretending to sovereignty, that is pretending to a moral right of defending its existence against all other communities derives the civil and temporal authority of its laws not from its actual rulers, nor even from its magistracy, but from itself."

In other words the Revolution emanated from the fact that the people decided to rule themselves. The result was of course the only result that could be expected, which was that conflict that having done with monarchical rule entered upon rule by the people, in actual reality, ruled by a president. In passing it may not be out of place to mention that as far as history seems to show, any attempt by the people to govern themselves has merely changed the name of the figure head. Thus the wish of the people to rule themselves in the days of King Charles led to that peculiar monarch losing his head and his crown and the people gaining rule by Oliver Cromwell. Government by the people must have a figure head whether it be a king or president, though it be of course granted that the laws emanating when either are in power are of a vastly different nature. But to return from our digression.

The other great potent fact in the formation of the Revolution, according to Belloc, was the hand of the great writer Rousseau.

In describing the effect Rousseau had on the



formation of the French Revolution Belloc gives us an interesting discussion of the influence of style on the minds of men. "Men" says Belloc "are influenced by the word. Spoken or written, the word is the organ of persuasion and therefore of moral government." It is then of course clearly evident that something Rousseau wrote about was to do with the idea of the French Revolution, that idea which we have just described as "government by the people." Thus says Belloc "the text of the Revolution was his "Contrat Social." If it be closely read the Contrat Social will be discovered to say all that can be said of the moral basis of democracy. The ridiculous and shameful argument that strength is the basis of authority is contemptuously dismissed. It is with the fifth chapter that the powerful argument begins and the logical precedence of human association to any particular form of government is the foundation stone of that analysis."

There were two arguments levelled against democracy which Belloc tells us, Rousseau had to face, the one that true democracy is better suited to angels than to men, the other that in large communities men are not conscious enough of the state to practice democracy.

We have then the two main reasons that led to the Revolution the political theory as stated by Belloc and the writings of Rousseau. It must be clearly understood that when we agree with Belloc that these positions started the ideals that led to Revolution we are quite aware

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that the *actual* starting of the Revolution was caused by much smaller things such as the personality of Louis, the contemptuous attitude of Marie Antoinette for the French and the tyranny of the aristocracy. All these points Belloc brings out with remarkable clearness in his book. It is not our business here to enquire whether Belloc is right in assuming that Louis was not personally responsible for the downfall of the monarchy. This and other points of controversy must be considered at the end of the chapter. We have now to look at the actual Revolution and discover how Belloc deals with its progress.

For Belloc the first great point that the student of the French Revolution must get at is the nature of the quarrel between the Crown and its first Parliament. It really comes to this, it was as Belloc says "an issue that lay between legality and illegality." That is to say quite simply that the quarrel was upon points of how far certain powers used were fair and just or the contrary. The king we read was absolute in a degree that we in this country can scarcely conceive, it is true that we have had despotism but it has been mild compared to that wielded by Louis. It is no exaggeration to say perhaps vulgarly that Louis had the power to decide what a man might eat for breakfast. The quarrel then further between Parliament and the Crown was the realisation by the people that such autocracy was nothing short of tyranny.

This quarrel according to Belloc leads by

stages to the flight of the king and queen which ended so disastrously at Varenne. It ends what we may call the third phase of the revolution, the first phase had been the failure of a counter revolution, the second was the king feeling that security that so often seems to precede great danger.

We must now consider the second point that had great influence on the trend of the Revolution which was of course the failure of the King and Queen to find escape by flight. How does Belloc consider this acted upon the progress of the conflict ?

With the end of the flight we find that Belloc with his usual powers of precision has started us into the fourth phase of the Revolution. Of the effect of the failure of the flight he says " The unwisdom of the flight it would be difficult to exaggerate : it is impossible to exaggerate the moral revolution caused by its failure. It was regarded virtually an abdication." I must here differ with Belloc. From his general attitude to the French Revolution, it is evident that he thought Louis by this flight did not mean to do any more than temporarily use *discretion* and get out of the way of danger, Belloc seems to think that there was no idea then of a Republic. He is I am convinced quite wrong. From a careful reading of the various historians it stands out paramount that when the king started his flight he knew that it was an abdication, he could see in the early dawn the great word Republic.



We have now to consider the fifth phase of the Revolution which leads us up all too quickly to the awful events that led to the Terror, that led to the overtime of the guillotine, that laid the head of king and peasant and dictator and queen under the bloody knife that fell with the precision of a well trained instrument.

The phase which we are considering with Belloc opens with the September massacres which caused the whole civilised world to shudder with horror. This is what happened. "These prisoners in the jails of the city were massacred to the number of eleven hundred by a small but organised band of assassins." In regard to this event which has so stained the history of France I wish to examine the question of the responsibility of Danton for them. To do this I must first of all see what Belloc has to say of this matter. Thus he says "The legend that Danton was connected with the massacres is based on insufficient historical foundation." This may be so and it is probably incorrect to suggest that Danton took actual part in the massacres. The problem is, did he if he had the power try and stop the whole business? I shall leave the problem to my readers, but shall insist that Belloc is rather too ready to give the benefit of the doubt to Danton. Responsibility as has been so often proved, is an extraordinarily elastic word, it can mean the actual doing of a thing, it can equally mean the failure to do something. If then Danton could have stopped the massacres and did not then he was as much

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responsible for them, as though he had given the direct orders to the assassins. But of whether he *was* in a position to check them is a question I cannot enter into here.

We then proceed to the vital part of the Revolution that has to do with the "Terror." On this particular question I can find no agreement with Belloc at all. With an easy assurance that is very nearly ludicrous, if it was not pathetic, Belloc insists that the "Terror" was merely military discipline carried to a logical conclusion. This is of course pure nonsense, the "Terror" was an outrage to all decent ideas of justice, it was an appeal to brute force carried out by a tyrant. Again, as with the character of Danton, Belloc lets Robespierre down much too lightly. It is of course true that a certain legendary Robespierre has grown up, a Robespierre that is painted as an everlasting tyrant. This I think is to read the character of the great dictator falsely, until he became spoilt by power Robespierre was really a kind of priestly philosopher concerned with the immortality of the soul and the eternity of God. While Belloc is right in pointing this out, he condones his conduct as the champion of the "Terror" with ill advised leniency.

Strangely enough while usually defending Robespierre Belloc condemns him roundly for his conduct which led to the execution of Danton. With this attitude I cannot agree. Robespierre when he assented to the death of Danton had in his mind at that moment the

stopping of the Terror, it was only after when he saw himself as in supreme power that he defended the instrument of the "Terror."

Of this most remarkable and in many ways godly man Belloc says "the irony of history would have it that the fall of this man which was chiefly due to his interference with the system of the Terror broke all the moral force upon which the Terror itself had resided; for men had imagined that the Terror was his work, and that he gone, no excuse was left for it. A reaction began which makes of this date the true term in that ascending series of revolutionary effort which had by then discussed every aspect of democracy, succeeded in the military defence of that experiment and laid down, though so far in words only the basis of the modern state."

It is then I think fairly evident that Belloc wishes to excuse Robespierre for the part he played in the awful "Terror" when men wished for death and prayed that it might not be until the day after the next, when the French prisons in the gray dawn of day beheld a shuddering mass of humanity that listened in the extreme of terror for the name to be read out that should send them along in the creaking tumbril to die as the sun rose slowly in the East, that sun that rose in the East when Louis laid his head under the knife, when the knife let free the soul of Marie Antoinette, when Danton with the bitter smile died, when at last Robespierre with the shattered jaw passed on with a groan and a people shouted it is done. In these times I say



I believe for at least one period Robespierre and the "Terror" were one, it was not that men came to *look* upon them as synonymous. With this then I pass to the military aspect of the Revolution as seen by Belloc.

I am inclined to the opinion that in dealing with the military aspect of the French Revolution Belloc has given us some of his most valuable work. Though the average boy at the average public school could probably tell you that the king and queen of France lost their heads in the revolution, that there was a terrible military tribunal that sent men by the score to the guillotine, though they might have a very vague idea that the Church had something to say against the conflict, it is probable that not one in even the sixth would know anything about the military side of the revolution; let alone possess in any accurate sense what was the trend of the military situation. I am amazed at the utter lack of teaching in our schools of continental history of the later centuries, it seems incredible that the schoolboy versed in Hannibal, versed in Vergil, knowing of the battles of Crecy, of Poitiers, of Agincourt should not be taught the main facts of the military genius of the French Revolution; genius that led to the imposition on France of a society as different to the preceding one, as was the violent change in the Roman Empire occasioned by the inroads of Christianity.

"The Revolution" says Belloc "would never have achieved its object, on the contrary,

it would have led to no less than a violent reaction against those principles which were maturing before it broke out, and which it carried to triumph, had not the armies of revolutionary France proved successful in the field; but the grasping of this mere historic fact, I mean the success of the revolutionary armies, is unfortunately no simple matter. The nature, the cause and the extent of the military success which alone made this possible, is widely ignored and still more widely misunderstood." Yet and here is the strange irony of the picture; those strokes of military genius that made the success of the Revolution possible, gradually led to that dreadful evening when with the sun sinking in the West, the great Napoleon fled and the great army of France fled battered in body, in soul, in spirit. But it is our business to examine the military situation during the Revolution, we must close our eyes to the awful failure of the French later to do anything that did not lead to military disaster.

How far history is made by military achievement would be an interesting discussion, not less interesting would it be to discuss how far history has made the military position in various countries what it is."

For Belloc there are three points which we must consider when we are looking at the military aspect of the events of the years from 1779 to 1784, they are firstly that the Revolution succeeded, secondly that it succeeded through certain military aptitudes which found civil

sympathy, thirdly, that the element of chance so great a part of military endeavour worked in favour of the Revolution in the poignant moments of the early wars.

Firstly then the "Revolution succeeded." Of this fact do we agree that it did? To a very large extent the Revolution did what it set out to do, it got rid of a tyrannous and corrupt monarchy, it set up in its place a rule that at least at the time seemed rule of the people by the people. But the success of a Revolution cannot be entirely judged by its immediate effect, the fruits must come after. We cannot enter into the everlasting problem as to whether France to-day can be said to be what the Revolutionary visionaries would have had that she should be, we can only just suggest that in many ways France has betrayed her trust, that she has not the place in Europe the Revolution should have carved out for her and that in that limited sense the Revolution did not achieve the lasting results that might have been expected by those who in the five terrible years of its progress supported the ideals of the Republicans. But to return; the successful issue of the conflict at the time was achieved by the military party, with this proposition of Belloc we have no quarrel. No Revolution in modern times could hope to achieve anything that did not have a vast and certain military success, Belloc has done well in giving so much time to the relation between political success and military enterprise. The importance of the relations of these two cannot



be overestimated, each succeeding war (and I believe war to be inevitable while the world is not Christian) will demonstrate this.

The second thing to be noted about the military situation was that the military activity found a responsive sympathy in the civil or rather in the political activity. This factor Mr. Belloc brings out with great clearness. There had been days of anxiety when it had seemed as if the French force must be overwhelmed, but "it was the genius of Danton, as we now know, that chiefly organised the withdrawal of what might have still been a dangerous invading force. It is principally due to him that no unwise Jingoism was permitted to claim a trial of strength with the invader, that he was allowed to retire with all his guns, his colours and his train. The retreat was lengthy and unmolested, though watched by the French forces that discreetly shepherded it but were kept tightly in hand from Paris. It was more than three weeks later when the Allied Army upon which Europe and the French Monarchy had counted for an immediate settlement of the Revolution, recrossed the Frontier and in this doubtful and perhaps inexplicable fashion the first campaign of the European Powers against the Revolution utterly failed." It is then obvious how much the military success did owe to the wise politicians at Paris, politicians who understood military matters, and not, as our politicians to-day, men who think that they can dictate the conduct of a battle from Westminster when they

have merely read of war in the comfortable armchair of a St. James' Street or Pall Mall Club.

The third point to be noted is that strange element that plays so much in human affairs, that makes us often believe in God, which often has the reverse effect, chance, the word that means perhaps more to military history than any other word.

It was this indefinable element that took its stand on the side of the French army that did so much to make their undertakings a success. There is no need to go into the long discussion on this subject that Belloc gives us, he has only to be read for it to be seen how much the French Army owed to chance, even if at the same time it owed as much to the efficiency of its political control and the sympathy of the civil population.

It is now that we come to that most interesting question, The French Revolution and The Catholic Church. Much has been written of this from various points of view, the Church has been blamed for its attitude to the Revolution, the Revolution has been deemed as absolutely anti-Catholic, on the other hand it has been said that there is no real connection between the events of the Revolution and the Catholic Church. Which of these is right does not particularly concern us in this book ; beyond that we must see how far we can be in agreement or not with regard to this difficult problem.

At the very outset Belloc propounds a problem which requires the greatest consideration, as upon our solution of it, or attitude to it,

depends very largely our point of view on the Revolution and The Church. It is this.

Mr. Belloc asks "Was there a necessary and fundamental quarrel between the doctrines of the Revolution and those of the Catholic Church."

It is of course the popular idea that there must have been a fundamental antagonism between the Catholic Church and The Revolution. Such an assumption would appear to be based on what people commonly suppose the Church stands for. This is of course broadly speaking peace and good-will. Such an assumption will be so far true, but people will then go further, they will look at the conduct of revolutions, and the French one in particular, and they will be tempted to say such a practice cannot be anything but truly contrary to what the Church holds.

So far they will be right, the Church can never agree with violent death, she can never acquiesce in massacre, she cannot uphold tyranny. But, and this is where the popular conception is wrong, there need not be, (nor was there), any necessary antagonism between the *ideals* of the Revolution and the Catholic Church. This is the Belloc position. When he says that there was no fundamental antagonism between the Church and the Revolution he means there was none between the ideals of the Revolution and the teaching of the Church. He of course does not infer for a moment that the conduct of the conflict was agreeable to the Church. Of course



it could not be while the Church kept the old doctrines of 'peace upon earth and goodwill to men.'

On this question Belloc says "Historically and logically, theologically also, those who affirm a necessary antagonism between the Republic and the Church are in error.

Those who are best fitted to approach the problem by their knowledge both of what the Revolution attempted and what Catholic philosophy is, find it in proportion to their knowledge difficult or impossible to answer that fundamental question in the affirmative. They cannot call the Revolution a necessary enemy of the Church nor the Church of Democracy."

We have then got this fundamental and important question clear.

But, and Belloc is clear on this, a quarrel did arise between the Church and the Republic. And it was, (Belloc here with a strange frankness admits the fact), that at the period just before the Revolution in France, the Catholic Church was at such a low ebb that men might well think she was dead or at least too ill to recover. It has been ever so, men have always thought that in times of theological and ecclesiastical sloth, the death of the Church is upon them, never have they been more mistaken, the more men think that the Church is dead the more are they likely to be very speedily disillusioned.

But far from being dead the Church suddenly awoke and discovered what was going on. This was the source of the trouble. "The true

historical point of departure from which we must date the beginning of this profound debate between the Revolution and Catholicism is to be found in the morning of the 30th May, 1790, when a parliamentary committee (the Ecclesiastical Committee) presented to the House its plan for the reform of the Constitution of the Church in Gaul."

Finally the quarrel developed into an attempt to dechristianise France but as Belloc points out. it failed. "Public worship" he says "was restored and the Concordat of Napoleon was believed to have settled the relations between Church and State in a permanent fashion."

Belloc in this book on the French Revolution has probably done his most valuable work. It is absolutely necessary that students of history should know the various aspects of that great conflict. It is not enough that they should know *what* took place, it is fundamental that they shall know *why* it took place. That is the keynote of Belloc's book, whether we agree with his positions or whether we do not, the essence of his work has been that we shall understand the "why." I do not think that the student could hope to do better than study this book on the Revolution very carefully, it has the advantage of being written by a man who knows the episode from the French side. In a book not long ago Mr. Chesterton said "that no man, not even Carlyle had understood the French Revolution," to a certain extent he is right, but Belloc, though

we differ with him in some matters, has a masterly understanding of the great Revolution that beheaded a king and queen, destroyed a monarchy and set up a Republic, made a genius a dictator and then killed him, made men see God and then made them curse Him, and above all changed a Society that had seemed at one time as permanent as the mountain or sea.



## *Chapter Five*

### BELLOC THE POLITICIAN

I HAVE called this chapter under perhaps rather a vague heading, it may quite well be urged, it is in regard to the question of the Jews that Belloc may be best estimated as a politician, or it may be demanded that his book on the Faith is but a political treatise dressed in an ecclesiastical cloak, why then call this chapter "Belloc The Politician?" In this chapter I use the word politician in a somewhat narrow sense, in a particular application, which is the attitude Belloc takes to the House of Commons. Now to-day it is quite obvious to even those who merely know that the House is at Westminster that the importance of the subject of the House is paramount.

Though I cannot agree with certain very eminent women who spend a good deal of time not far from Victoria Street, that women to-day are as interested in politics as they are in babies, though I cannot believe that the average man knows much more than the name of his member, yet generally speaking there is a growing feeling that the House of Commons is a vital force. either for good or for evil, though the day is not

yet when we shall be as interested in the House debates as the Derby or the Gold Cup at Ascot, yet I repeat, the public is coming round to the position of demanding to know what the House is, and what is much more important what it *does*. In this chapter it is our business to as fully as possible discuss the Belloc position with regard to the House of Commons and especially examine certain contentions with regard to construction that he sets forth.

As in common with a great deal of his work Belloc works out a book from a given thesis. In this one the question that of course really matters is whether the thesis is based on an accurate assumption, whether it is historically true, whether it is in agreement with what we gather from knowledge or rather, more fully from experience. In this work on the House of Commons Belloc propounds that "the House of Commons was formed by, and is essentially part of, an Aristocratic State. England having ceased to be an Aristocratic State the House of Commons is ceasing to function."

Before challenging this remarkable statement we must ask what is an Aristocratic State? And we find it to be according to Belloc "a particular public temper which favours the power of a restricted class," in more simple and popular language, in an Aristocratic State the government lies in the hands of the few. And further, it lies in the hands of a peculiar few. Such then is the position.

It is that the House of Commons cannot exist except in the middle of an Aristocratic State, that this Aristocratic State is to-day on the decline, that therefore the House of Commons to-day is ceasing to be effective in the sense when the word implies in perhaps the military sense, a certain measure of work to be done, or authority to be wielded. We have then brought Belloc down to the above three main contentions, they are contentions, of destruction appertaining to the inefficiency of the House of Commons, we must look at them in detail before criticising his possible alternatives to our present form of Government.

The first proposition then that we have to examine is that propounded by Belloc that the House of Commons cannot exist except in the middle of an Aristocratic State, that is to say a state that has not only reliance on an oligarchy as the best form of government, but an oligarchy of a particular nature. We do not wish to anticipate what must be said in looking at the third contention, as to the power of the House of Commons to-day to be effective. The question before us is a more general one ; which is ; whether the House of Commons can exist *at all* to-day if we admit that England is no longer an Aristocratic State.

Now it is of course perfectly obvious that the House of Commons *does* exist to-day, it is also perfectly obvious that it is in every sense still an oligarchy, but is it so perfectly obvious that the State in which it functions to-day is an



aristocratic one? If it still functions (even in a somewhat limited sense) in England to-day, if England to-day is non-aristocratic then Belloc is at fault in his argument. The question then further is, is England an Aristocratic State? There does not seem to me to be any particular reason to suggest that it is not. The essence of aristocracy (apart from the popular and fallacious idea that such a State is dependent upon birth), is the belief in the Government of the many by the few, and by the few selected by means of election by the many.

Taking the Belloc definition of an Aristocratic State; even if the government of the country was by a selected number of costers or jockeys, it would be by an oligarchy. To-day then I contend that England is still an Aristocratic State, I contend that the House of Commons is a select and definite expression of the wish of the people for government by the few. It is absurd to suggest as Belloc does, that England is no longer an Aristocratic State, and that therefore the House of Commons is unable to function, the only thing that could smash rule by Parliament would be a return to an autocracy thought by many to be a democracy. Belloc for reasons of policy does not like the House, he is annoyed that rightly it will not be dictated to by eminent literary men, let the House only adopt Belloc's absurd anti-Jewish propaganda and we should see him contesting some constituency with no doubt Chesterton on the right, Shaw on the left, Wells in front and many Editors of The

Free Press constituting the House. Let us only rid ourselves of the popular and snobbish idea of Aristocracy, that it is to be found in Mayfair and not in Bloomsbury, that it is educated at Eton and not at the grammar school, let us realise that it is a form of government still functioning to-day, though different in detail to a hundred years ago, let us understand that governments can change in detail but not in fundamental composition, and it will be soon apparent that in the political sense England is an Aristocratic State; must be, while there is a House of Commons. It is the destruction of the House of Commons. that would destroy the Aristocratic State because should such a thing happen it would mean that the people no longer wished for the Essence of Aristocracy, rule by a selected few.

I find it a little difficult to discuss the question as to whether the House of Commons could function in any other than an Aristocratic State. If of course that means purely and simply a State in which the ideal of oligarchical rule is popular ; then I cannot think that the House could function in any other kind of state. If on the other hand by an Aristocratic State we infer something to do with birth ; then I am equally convinced that the House could exist whether the State was Aristocratic or not. It entirely depends upon the sense in which we use that word ; as Belloc means it to be used in the political sense of government by the few, then I agree that the House could only flourish in a community constituted thus.

With the Belloc contention that the efficiency of the House of Commons is on the decline we are brought to our second consideration; as to whether at the present day England is ceasing to be an Aristocratic State. Mr. Belloc is convinced that it is so and he is so convinced on superficial grounds. They are that the electorate no longer care for whether their candidates are gentlemen and that the House is really looked upon not as a sort of sacrament of British constitution but rather as a place of assembly wherein would be settled such things as prices of food, or the trend of wages. In a word the House is looked upon as the "Something" that determines the course of life not only in the home but also conditions of work. It is then a practical body, perhaps not Aristocratically exclusive as formerly, and it is these reasons that make Belloc uneasy as to the functions of the House of Commons.

Now from the other side, that is from the side of the House of Commons itself we find that Belloc is equally pessimistic, the Aristocratic spirit he thinks is entirely fading away from it. "The House of Commons" he says "progressively failed to maintain the Aristocratic attitude, It slowly began to lose the respect of the governed. By our own day, in the last few years it has lost that respect altogether."

Now with regard to this charge of a downward tendency on the part of the House we must unfortunately find ourselves in strong agreement with Belloc. While we do not admit that the



House of Commons has lost *all* respect from the country as a whole ; yet it is becoming evident that (though as I have said people look upon it as a "Something" to guide their daily life), many feel that the House has become corrupt.

In large part this is due to the unfortunate fact that political promises have a nasty habit of being broken, that being in Parliament is no longer a matter of a grave responsibility, that there is a very unpleasant suggestion that office is sought regardless of aptitude, and that feminine influence has more than its right share in certain appointments. All these naturally tend to a distrust among the electorate.

It will not be without interest to quote from Belloc some of the particular instances of corruption which are liable to point to a general corruption of the House of Commons. "Examples" said Belloc "succeed each other daily and are never absent from the atmosphere of Westminster, a man has but to recall the more notorious, the two or three dozen that stand out in the last seven years from Marconi to the McAlpines and from the Samuel silver deal to the Dope Scandal. They form a sufficient list."

And there is of course that most pernicious of scandals the sale of honours, this disgraceful parody of honour has probably done more to lower the House in the eyes of the public than anything else. Peerages for soap are outclassed by peerages for running successful newspapers with a not *too* definite policy, knights become

so not so much for quality as for quantity, positions of honour in the House itself are not always awarded with no thought of secret influence. There is no need to dwell further on an unpleasant subject, though we do not like the Belloc politics, though we do not agree with him that people no longer want an oligarchical rule, though we demand that to say the House of Commons has lost all respect is to exaggerate, we do at the same time feel forced to agree that in many ways there is corruption going on within the House which is causing distrust in the country, we must admit that Belloc in this matter is perfectly right. With this we come to consider the third contention that the House is no longer an "effective" still using the word in the military sense and that therefore it is of no account to the state.

When we are arguing as to the "effectiveness" of the House of Commons we are aware that we are dealing with a controversial and difficult subject. We have above enumerated some of the indiscretions of the House that has made her in danger of losing self respect, we have seen that corruption is within; yet to-day in many ways it seems to us, the House functions and not only that functions well and with authority. Whatever men may say, whatever the press may write, whatever women who really do not in the least understand politics may state, whatever political propagandists such as Chesterton and Belloc may think of the House, may write of it in their own rather small and unimportant journals, the fact does remain that to

a very large number of people the House of Commons represents *power* even if it does not to any large extent produce *respect*. It may be true that to-day men do not look to the House as something almost Holy as they did seventy years ago, it may be true that they feel the House is to many of its members but a profession, it may be true that no longer does the House seem to be the expression of the best ideals of state ; yet at the same time there is a feeling that the institution has not anything like reached its last illness. The House of Commons to-day much like the Catholic Church of the immediately preceding days of the French Revolution is undergoing a time in which it is in a state of decay, but the damage is not too far advanced to admit of no hope of repair. This is where we part company with Belloc, we cannot think he is correct in thinking the House to be too far gone for a chance of recovery.

“ No reform will save it ” says Belloc with the certainty of the man who has tried no reform. Having said in an earlier book that when dying the Catholic Church reasserted herself, in this book Mr. Belloc turns round and says with a queer disregard for history “ Dying institutions do not restore themselves.” he forgets the recovery of the Monarchy after the death of Oliver Cromwell, he forgets the history of his beloved Catholic Church, he forgets that nearly every age has thought itself in some ways to be dying, he forgets that the dying have very often strange powers of reassertion. Yet in spite of



the trend of history showing undoubtedly reform in the most corrupt bodies, (the Oxford Movement is not a bad example) and the recovery of the Church in France a hundred years ago as I have pointed out ; Belloc calmly says with regard to the hopelessness of reforming the House " You have never yet got in history a thoroughly corrupt governing organ reforming and restoring itself." Such a statement is pure nonsense and is quite possibly made with a purpose, certain institutions that Belloc knows were so corrupt as to be considered past reform, have been regenerated, but he does not wish to admit of the depth of their degradation. Belloc does not want the House of Commons because it does not support his own political ideas ; therefore he hopes to get rid of it with a pretence of horror at the enormities of the institution. For the same reason that it does not agree with him he attacks the press, simply because he wishes to have his own organs which should endeavour to turn public opinion along the lines of his political and diplomatic ambitions.

I say then that such a doctrine of hopelessness as Belloc preaches is not only a mistaken one, it is also a dangerous one. Nothing is so apparent to-day as the fact that we as a country are always being belittled, we are told here that the House of Commons is no longer of use, we are told there that our drama is without parallel in the matter of poorness, we are informed that our press is sensational and corrupt, we are

almost daily told by high ecclesiastical officials that England has had her day, almost daily statesmen suggest that we are in Queer Street. Such a tendency is dangerous, men are always more ready to believe in a negative than in a positive, they have a liking for seeing the coming end of their country, not because they dislike it, but because men naturally see a golden past and a copper future ; it is really only in the public schools and the Army that men still see the greatness of this small island, the parent of a mighty empire. Women in another sense see the downfall of the country, they for their own ambitions attribute it to Man's muddling, they teach the most pernicious doctrines of sex hatred and a woman's world, a thing so hateful, so ridiculous, so anti-progressive, as to make one shudder that such a possibility could be even contemplated. It is then of the utmost danger when a man of the brilliance of Belloc comes along and suggests that the official residence of the Government of the country is so bad as to be past reform. But we must now turn to Belloc's constructive policy ; alternatives to the House. This is what he says.

“ What should take the place of the lost Sovereignty of Parliament ? Monarchy preferably supported by Councils of real interests should be substituted for Parliament.”

We have now to assume that the awful thing suggested by Belloc has come to pass. We have to imagine that we are at Westminster, the House

of Commons has been turned into a picture palace, the journalists in Fleet Street who would have been found in the lobby waiting for their members have gone into the Workhouse, the out of work Parliamentarians have formed a guild to demand that they shall receive out of work pay and Messrs. Chesterton, Shaw, Belloc and Wells are running the country. Mr. Chesterton is in charge of a campaign to destroy marriage by forbidding divorce, Mr. Shaw is attempting to found a home for Super Men at Golders Green, Mr. Belloc is away on a tour to visit the Jewish settlement near the South Pole, while Mr. Wells is writing a history of The House of Commons.

. . . . .

It is of course always valuable to look at the constructive part of any book, even if that construction, (as in this case) deals with a suppositious "if"; therefore the suggestions of Belloc with regard to substitutes for the House of Commons are not only interesting but in a limited sense they are valuable. They are valuable in showing that even in England there *are* people who would consider the possibility of rule other than by the present system. In the first place it will be convenient to take the case of The Councils and see what Belloc has to say for them.

"The decline of the House of Commons leaves room for only one fundamental institution and that institution is Monarchy. But subsidiary to the Monarchy there should, and let us hope



may be supporting Councils representing real interests, and therefore vital ; that is, clothed with real authority because they would speak for real desires and would stand for what men really did and thought. A cotton spinner does not work and think as a citizen of the South East-Manchester division : he works and thinks as a Cotton Spinner."

The main argument that Belloc uses in favour of these Councils is that they would cause the citizens to take an active and personal part in them. This is of course true enough , the cotton spinner knowing that his Council was interested in Cotton Spinning would naturally be interested in the doings of that Council, the manufacturer of treacle would be interested in the Council that dealt with the interests of treacle. All would be well up to a point, but would not these Councils soon become simply "local" that is self centred with no national outlook whatever ? I put this forward as a suggestion. According to Belloc these Councils would really grow out of the Guilds and Trade Unions. But really Belloc is in agreement with what we have suggested above, that is the danger of the "local" character of them ; "There is one overwhelming function denied to them and that is the function of Sovereignty." It works down then for Belloc to the absolute necessity once again of a King and a King with supreme power. Thus he pleads "Of all the various functions once exercised here in England by the House of Commons, the Aristocratic organ of what

was then an Aristocratic State, the fundamental function was Sovereignty. It was as a Sovereign Assembly that Parliament, while it still had moral authority, governed England. Now that it has lost that authority something must take its place and the only "something" conceivable is a King."

It is indeed a bold policy in these days to suggest the advantage of an absolute monarchy, the type of monarchy which would have the power of granting privileges to nations and individuals or possessing power of taking them away. Looking at history whether our own or that of continental countries, the success of supreme rule by a king has not apparently met with the greatest amount of success, it failed in England in the time of John, it failed in France and culminated in the fall of Louis the Sixteenth, it resulted in Russia in our own day in a system of anarchy unsurpassed.

What Belloc has to say for the monarchy is that it would mean that there was some Head which would induce in the people the thought of respect to that Head, in the same way that formerly they paid to the House of Commons. It is as he says further that one man shall be responsible for at a certain time the fate of Society.

We cannot agree with Belloc that the restoration of the absoluteness of the Monarchy, even if the House no longer existed, would be even conceivable, it would merely mean that the king would become a tyrant and his tyranny would be made workable by a number of smaller tyrants.

We like the monarchy as it is ; in many ways the idea of a king is good. It fosters patriotism, it causes affection, it is romantic, it represents in a figure head the trend of the thought of a nation. With the thought of an absolute ruler we have no sympathy whatever and Belloc would find himself more curbed than he is now.

This book that we have been considering is an interesting one, though it suggests a state of politics which we think is far from accurate, it suggests rather superficially a return to a form of government that in the past has not succeeded. We have now come to the task of looking at Belloc from the standpoint upon which he is perhaps best known, that is of course as a literary man, as the writer of charming verse and prose. We have dealt with him as an Historian, as a Controversialist, as a Theologian, as a Critic of the Press, as a Politician, we have agreed with very little that he has written on these subjects. With Belloc as a literary man we shall not have to disagree so much, literature is a wider thing than politics or even religion, it is not so much a point of view as an inspiration, it is a pure and sacred gift to turn men to think of higher things, it is an offshoot of God given to men and to certain men that they may write that those who read shall not only learn but shall find rest and content to their souls.

END OF PART ONE



## PART TWO

### *Chapter Six*

#### MR. BELLOC AS ESSAYIST

MANY no doubt reading this book about Belloc will say when they have arrived at this chapter, at last we have got to the real Belloc, the man who can write with charm, the man who can write "Everything" on "Nothing" and can go further and write on "Anything." Nothing reveals so much perhaps the personality of a man as those works which we in our day rather vaguely call his literary excursions.

The word Essay like the word novel has undergone a good deal of change since a hundred years ago. An Essay may be a long treatise that deals with the Doctrine of Sin, it may be a philosophical discussion on perhaps the Nature of The Universe, it may be a delightful ramble around the personality of a great literary figure like Swinburne (to wit Mr. Beerbohm's charming writing on that great poet at The Pines) it may be a political attempt as Belloc and The Jews and it may come down to almost the sketch form of delightful thoughts about life as we journey along, as we pass along the street, as we stand by the grave relentless sea, as we

remember some small incident perhaps the newspaper seller at the corner of the street or the little clapping of the small hands of a baby.

I say then that the Essay is a very elastic thing, yet it is not in any real sense even now popular. The Essayist must perhaps more than any other kind of writer refuse to write to order, he must be given ample scope, it is not too much to say that like a poet he must take out an Essayist's licence. But the Essayist has a noble task in front of him, he may have to discuss a grave theological problem or at the other extreme he may write a prose poem on small things. The Skilful Essayist can quite well write of a Poppy, he can write of a Haystack or he can write of a Swiss mountain. In each of these he will see something that can interest many men and women he can see that to some the poppy will be the emblem of God, to others the sign of love, to the more prosaic the symbol of the country; again of a Haystack he can see that many will romance of it, again of a mountain how different will be the feelings stirred. The Essayist then is really a man of moods, sometimes melancholy, sometimes cheerful, sometimes cynical, sometimes angry. He is aware that he must write as the mood has him, he is aware that he cannot write at will, he must wield the pen whenever he feels the compelling force.

In this chapter I have to as far as possible deal with Belloc's achievements as an Essayist and I am quite aware I may be told that I have done so already. I will therefore go

further ; when I speak here of Belloc as an Essayist I mean when he is writing purely literary thoughts about anything that seizes him for the moment.

I have endeavoured to suggest however inadequately what the Essay is, because there are bound to be certain rather intellectual people who will say Belloc is not an Essayist in the strict sense at all, he is a writer of political and historical thesis and when the mood is on him he is the originator of books of isolated and miscellaneous thoughts. With these highly intelligent people I shall beg to differ I shall ask them to look at those, who to-day, are claimed by the press and the public as Essayists. Mr. Chesterton with his paradoxical wanderings, Mr. Lucas with his delightful mutterings put to paper, Mr. Beerbohm with his inimitable Essays (yet for all that not much more than long sketches about men and things) or Mr. Benson with his sad yet attractive thoughts about life. If these are Essayists and it is as such that they are generally known, then it is no exaggeration to call Belloc an Essayist even if we confine that term to his books of random thoughts. And, if we let the controversy pass, if we let those who think they know better alone, we shall at least convince them that if (as is the purpose of this book) we are to get at the real Belloc then we must spend sometime looking at what he writes when in moments of obvious literary enthusiasm he puts pen to paper. For it is as I have said the best way to find out the Essence



of a writer to get at him through his spontaneous works when he writes because he cannot help it, when he has no special axe to grind, when he sits down to Essay on this that and the other, when he uses the Divine gift without perhaps thinking particularly about why he writes of this or that, simply that the thought comes and is obeyed.

I repeat then that it is when Belloc is in such mood that we are likely to best discover his soul. The soul of a writer is to be found in those works that are the product of the pleasure of his imagination.

In this chapter I propose to deal with three of Belloc's best known books of Essays, they may not be great, they may not be lasting, they may be ephemeral almost to the extent of being but journalism, they may be but jottings, but whatever they may be *called*, they will give us a very deep insight into the things that interest Belloc, the things that he wishes to write about, the way certain situations and people appeal to him.

And I will pick upon a book that with genius he has entitled "On Nothing." And of "Nothing" what does Belloc say? "Many things have I discovered about Nothing, which have proved it—to me at least—to be the warp or ground of all that is holiest. It is of such fine gossamer that loveliness was spun, the mist under the hills on an autumn morning are but gross reflections of it; moonshine on lovers is earthly compared with it, song sung most

charmingly and stirring the dearest recollections is but a failure in the human attempt to reach its embrace and be dissolved in it. It is out of Nothing that are woven those fine poems of which we carry but vague rhythms in the head."

Which is all of course to say in romantic language that in Nothing is Everything, perhaps (but we are not so sure) in Everything is to be found Nothing. Is such a thought grand? is it sad? is it cynical? Does Belloc really believe that Nothing the ultimate End of all that we can conceive is beautiful, lasting, or does he believe that Nothing is a kind of glorious Essence far behind, the force that makes the mists rise in the Autumn, the force that is behind the whisper of the night wind, the force that is behind love, the force that is really God; Nothing, Everything, the great Natural Order? We can only speculate. Belloc is using the Essayist's licence. And of "Nothing" Belloc has written a book, a book of things seen, things felt, things to come.

And at once dipping into the book we discover what Mr. Belloc thinks about Writing, the pleasure of creative work, the pleasure of the pen, the pleasure of the birth of noble thoughts. And the reason he likes the taking up of the pen is that it ensures a solitude even in the midst of a crowd. Yet further it is a thing that can add something to the world; and when tired, at will, the pen can be laid down. A short enough sketch but enough to convince us that Belloc knows the power of the pen, but why at

times has he not used its power more carefully?

It is a characteristic of to-day that of great men we like to know what they think of small things ; particularly is this so of famous writers. We are not really in the least excited to know what Barrie thinks of say the origin of species, but we should be delighted to know what he thought of eating mustard with mutton, we don't much care whether Chesterton believes in the Immaculate Conception but we want to know whether he thinks fair or dark girls make the best wives, we may not be thrilled to know that Galsworthy reads or does not read Ibsen but we should love to know what he thought of taxicabs as against hansoms. All this leads me to say that why this particular book of Belloc is interesting (apart from what I have already said) is that it gives us his opinions on small things. It will be therefore not inappropriate to take several of the subjects treated (as diverse as possible) and discover what he has to say. I shall select them not because of their merit or importance but simply with a view to their diversity.

In this particular kind of work on isolated subjects Belloc is somewhat akin to his great contemporary Mr. Chesterton, they both are interested in the things that come, they do not go out of their way to find them. Here is the difference between the natural writer and the man who writes because he thinks he can. The former need not look for subjects they come to him, the latter is always on the look out for



subjects but they do not come. But enough of digression that most prevalent fault of those who write books, the curtain is up, "Nothing" is before us, "Nothing" with her pure joy, her sweet note of Romance.

A very delightful little sketch Belloc writes on Ignorance, that delightful state of mind so common to politicians and young society girls, and really we are according to Belloc in a very bad way for he quite calmly tells us that "we are all ignorant of nearly everything there is to be known." If only we were, how delightful life would be, if only we did not always know that twenty shillings made a pound or that two and two made four.

Again as though to encourage us who are so profoundly ignorant Belloc tells us that even if we *are* ignorant there are some things we shall know better than the other man, if we are proved desperately ignorant of the complication of English titles, there is hope that we shall be able to shine in our knowledge of the Creed. So in our ignorance there is hope that we appear learned.

Then before we know it, in turning over the pages of "Nothing" we come upon an Essay on the Return of The Dead, that subject of which all are anxious to know and none ever do so, that subject upon which the Churches talk grandly, that subject upon which spiritualists make easy and lucrative victims, that subject upon which the young think more about than the old, that subject that we only really comprehend

the profundity, when we stand by the bed of one who lies cold, one upon whom not all the skill in the world could stay off the universal angel who travels to us when we least expect him. And the Essay hankers round the suggestion that Rabelais had returned to the dead and what was more convincing was billed to lecture at the School of Economics in London. Is Belloc serious in this little Essay, is he suggesting by means of a satire that the dead do return? We shall leave the answer to the nimble wits of our readers.

Yet again we approach a very different subject, a subject that reminds us of those days when the nursery was the world and the wood at the end of the drive the gate to fairyland, those days when we thought of ghosts at night, those days when we were foolish enough to wish that we might grow up. It is the subject of the Fairy Castle that Belloc deals with, it is a strange mystical thing that vanishes as we approach but yet, strange human nature, few of us ever quite cease from seeking it. It has made Mr. Belloc write some of his most charming prose. I shall quote him at length, here is brought out that romantic side of Belloc so strangely diverse from his political or propagandist mind. Of the Fairy Castle he writes, "This is that Fairy Castle. It is revealed at the sound of a trumpet; we turn our eyes, we glance and we perceive it; we strain to reach it—in the very effort of our going the doom of human labour falls upon us and it vanishes away. It is real or unreal. It is unreal

like that island which I thought to see some miles from Africa, but which was not truly there : for the ship when it came to the place that island had occupied sailed easily over an empty sea. It is real like those high Sierras which I drew from the Sacramento River at the turn of the night and which were suddenly obliterated by the rising sun. Where the vision is but mirage, even there it is a symbol of our goal ; where it stands fast and true, for however brief a moment, it can illumine, and should determine the whole of our lives. For such sights are the manifestation of that glory which lies permanently beyond the changing of the world. Of such a sort are the young passionate intentions to relieve the burden of mankind, first love, the mood created by certain strains of music and—as I am willing to believe—the Walls of Heaven.

But I am reminded that I am to write not of one book but of three ; reluctantly then I must not write more of “ Nothing ” I must ask my readers to travel with Belloc along a Southern Harbour, I must ask them to introduce themselves to *The Fisherman*, they must I fear turn to “ Nothing ” to hear of *Conversations in Trains*, even I must refrain from telling them of Belloc and *A Man and A Dog*. Instead I must pass on to another book of Belloc and again I must see what he tells us and I know that as long as he *Essays* it will be of something good, of something that is not made with hands, of something that gold cannot buy, of something



that is near the Sea, that is near the valley, that dwells in the land of Truth and that tells of a Temple not made with hands yet for all that Real.

Not very long after Belloc had written on "Nothing" there is evidence that he intended to prove a theory. From this book on "Nothing" had we wished to deduct a moral (hateful word) it would have been fairly easy to see that what he was driving at was that "Nothing" was really Everything. It would have been an old enough thought, a thought suggested by perhaps all the purest philosophy, a thought perhaps religious, perhaps profane. At any rate Belloc having written a great deal on "Nothing" soon wrote a great deal more on "Everything." Again we are faced with a book of Essays, again we are faced with the fact that they are about much in general and nothing in particular; but they show a different mind. Belloc in this book is not quite so confiding, he is a little colder with us, they have the traces of being written by someone who knows that what he says will be read, that what he says will be taken for true, there is in these Essays (faint though it may be) an underlying self-satisfaction which charming as these works are places them in a different category. It leads us to discuss that old literary problem, does success make a writer more attractive, are the early works like a young child, more attractive than the mature efforts? It is not possible to give any definite answer, it entirely depends on the

writer. With Belloc as Essayist I am convinced that his first book was the best, because it was more child-like, more spontaneous, more of the mind of the writer who is beginning to discover that he can write and write so that many shall read.

It is a strange thing to ride down Oxford Street on the top of a bus, it is stranger still to speculate on the ultimate destiny of the masses of humanity visible to the eye. There a well dressed woman up from the suburbs, there a better dressed one from Mayfair, there a too well dressed one from Soho, there a smart business man from the City, there again a shabby parson from a Sussex village. A sight enough to make one speculate as to the where and whither of these images that pass before our eyes and are soon lost to sight and memory. It is of such a thought that we discover Belloc to be aware, he is on a winter day (bold man) riding on the top of a bus down Oxford Street, that street that is as unlike Oxford as the average suburban villa is unlike its name very often. "It was" he writes "in Oxford Street and upon the top of an omnibus during one of those despairing winter days, the light just gone and an air rising which was neither vigorous nor cold, but sodden like the hearts of all round, that I fell wondering whether there was some ultimate goal for men, and whether these adventures of ours, which grow tamer as the years proceed, are lost at last in a blank nothingness, or whether there are revelations and discoveries to come." The jolting of the bus, the queer glow of a London

Street on a winter's eve, the curious sensation of drifting one feels on the top of a bus in the dark, the odd murkiness of those brave passengers with us, all these things are likely to make a man of the type of Belloc ponder on the fate of the soul. It is a fine Essay a vindication of the sometimes denied truth that even in the midst of the artificiality of a great London Street the thought paramount to a thinking man is the fate of the soul.

But we proceed to find later Belloc in satirical mood. Of all the gifts of the pen perhaps the most fraught with danger is that which resolves itself into satire. It is indeed difficult to distinguish between cynicism and satire, perhaps the former is born of disappointment perhaps the latter is born of humour. Let it remain so and it cannot be called debased, let it become cold and let it die. As a satirist Belloc is not eminently successful, when he is satirical he is cynical, the mood seems to grip him with too firm a hold. In an imaginary conversation between a student (Belloc) and the Devil we find Belloc in satirical mood, the two journey together and finally arrive in Fleet Street. The student asks what a man in shirt sleeves, writing at great speed is doing. He is told that he is writing a series of satirical articles for the Morning Post, and here no doubt Belloc thinks he is very clever, "he is a journalist." Satire does not make us say at once that in no sense could Belloc ever be considered a journalist, he has much too fixed opinions, no newspaper would employ him for long, as a leader writer he would



cause any Editor to pass many sleepless nights.

We have given this example to show satire to Belloc is cheap sarcasm, it is an example of the mistake he makes in not keeping to Essays of the charm of the Fairy Castle or the thoughts on top of a bus. Gradually we are proving that the strength of Belloc lies in his half melancholy Essays, his thoughts of the sad and beautiful things in life. One more example from his "On Everything" must suffice before we turn to his other book "On Anything." It is chosen because of its diversity from others.

It is almost as if we were encroaching on the next chapter when we shall deal with Belloc as a traveller. But "The Weald" is so beautiful that it cannot be ignored, it is a tribute to the unchanging countryside, the Weald that persists though trains and motors charge through it, the Weald that lives in the same company as The Vale of White Horse or the South Downs, the Weald that lives when we are dead, the Weald through which at death may our souls pass and pass not too quickly. And of the Weald Belloc shall wax eloquent, he shall use all his powers of his love of Sussex, we will not stay him. "The Weald will never be conquered. It will always be the Weald. To be conquered is to suffer the will of another; the Weald will suffer no will but its own. The men of the Weald drive out men odious to them in manner, sometimes subtle, sometimes brutal, always in the long run successful. Economics break against the Weald as water breaks against stone. Here is some Latin.

Stat et stabit, manet et manebit, spectator orbis. She stands and still shall stand; she remains and shall remain: a watcher of the generations."

And so on to "Anything" another delightful book of Essays. There is not much that can be said about them that we have not already said. They are a medley of subjects dealt with in clear and robust style. Again I cannot do better than choose two or three of the subjects again choosing by merit of diversity rather than by subject.

A certain cynicism perhaps taints such an Essay as "on People and Books" especially in that part which talks of biographers who do not paint true pictures. Thus you have says Belloc such exaggeration as "biographies of politicians acting upon principle," and all, thinks Belloc seem to indicate "that the person inside the book does not go on like a human being."

Then we come to a very remarkable little discursion on the wonder of "Communications," and they are a good thing because they enable poor and undistinguished men to see the world and its people. Yet again we travel far with Belloc to the Kings Road, Chelsea, to visit with him a dying author and (what sadder sight) an unlucky one or perhaps not that but untalented. It is one of the most delightful Essays Belloc has written. I would that I could write page after page upon the charm of these sketches, their excursions here, there and everywhere, but already this chapter is long

enough and those who have got here may be well asking that I should sum up. This I will do so and at once.

Belloc as an Essayist will I think in the future occupy a strange position, he will be known as one and yet his fame will probably be on another score. We shall no doubt always find his Essays in the big libraries, we shall find them stowed away on the top shelf of the books in country houses, we shall find them not far perhaps from the books of sermons in the Rector's study, if we look diligently we may find them in the modern villa but I fear they may not be seen readily for the yellow covered novels that fill the shelves. I do not think Belloc is likely to have a very sudden or great popularity as an Essayist, he has become too much known as a politician or rather a political writer, a very different thing.

Yet when all is said and done, we at any rate shall in the winter sit by the fire and read him, when it is summer when the sun is slowly sinking, when there is that strange silence that heralds the summer night, we shall be found with Belloc, whenever we want rest from popular and crude fiction, when we want rest from the modern world with its gross vulgarities, we shall take down from the bookshelf "Nothing" "Everything" "Anything" and looking over the hills or looking over the chimney pots we shall find rest in the beauty of spontaneous literature of the things of this world and the world that dwells just beyond the edge.



## *Chapter Seven*

MR. BELLOC AND SUSSEX

**P**ERHAPS there cannot be found anything more delightfully romantic than a road. Long before we realise what a close analogy a road has to life we feel the thrill of the highway. Looking back perhaps twenty, thirty, forty years the romance of the road stands forth. Hardly any of our life does not have something to do with a road, when we were young we played horses and raced down the road that seemed to go on for ever and the excitement one day, that we turned a corner farther than we had ever been before.

A little later that same road took us to school and as the cab drove along we cried just a little, especially at that corner where we had always turned back to be home in time for lunch.

Then again along the same road out far beyond the farthest corner we went in childhood, out over the hills into the world. Yet again down that road with the bells ringing a merry peal and then almost before we knew it we were married. Perhaps then many years after; middle aged we travel along that road once more and the bell tolls as we go slowly along

behind those people we had once thought would live for ever. Yet again we travel the road, the bell tolls but we hear it not, it is our last journey and we have reached the furthest corner but this time we shall not come back. The road plays a part in all our joys and sorrows, yet almost without sympathy it looks the same, year in, year out, dusty in summer, muddy in winter but always leading to the next corner.

Reader, would that I might go along many roads with you, I would like to show you the road when the surface is as iron, when the pools are ice, when the sun rises in a dull red, I would like you to stumble along that road with me on a dark winter's night when all round is a wall of black and only our feet to guide, I would like you to come along in the middle of a summer day when the road makes our feet white with dust and our hearts warm with joy, when the sky seems to have no cloud, when a faint shimmer obscures the horizon, once more I would like you to come with me down that road on a summer eve when the sun is beginning to die, when the birds are beginning to fly away to bed, when the insects buzz and burr around, when the death of a summer day is beginning to make shadowy the hills at the end of the road.

But I must not, instead I must think of but one road, a road in Sussex, the Stane Street, on which Belloc has written such a delightful book. But even so I must wander yet a little further. Why is it of interest that such a book should be written, is it because the Stane Street

was and is a great Roman Road, is it because it wends its way through Sussex with its glorious downs and nestling villages, is it because it is a unique road destined at its birth to be the proud marching ground of many soldiers? Partly all these reasons are sufficient to warrant such a book, but they are not the root of the matter. To read of the Stane Street is to once more read of England when we really loved roads and all they meant; very largely now that love is lost, we look upon a road now simply as the vehicle by which we arrive somewhere, if we motor we hurry along so that we shall see the speedometer registers that which shall show our engine is running well, we can hardly conceive of the joy of the stage coach ploughing along, of the oslers ready outside the wayside inn, now perhaps the scouts of some abominable motor club, we can scarcely conceive of the romance of going to Rugby as Tom Brown did with his cold feet and belly full of kidneys, instead we hurry in a huge closed car and fly along intent to be there.

The Stane Street reminds us of how in a hurry we all are, how little we can spare of time to gaze at the wonder of an English road, we can't wait even to exchange a word with the road mender, we must away to the next city leaving only behind a cloud of dust. Belloc loves Sussex because he loves the Stane Street, he loves the Stane Street because it is a reproach to the vulgarity of our modern life, he loves it because it speaks of the forgotten centuries, he loves it because it reminds him of the genius of the



Romans, he loves it because it is unspoilt by time, he loves it because it has given him a book to write, to that book we must at once turn, and let nothing drive us into a backwater.

In Belloc's book there are perhaps four main points of interest upon which we must expend some time, they are the Roman Road in Britain, The Line of the Stane Street, The Character and History of the Street and the Modern Divergences. It will be convenient to examine these as they stand with a view to getting the Belloc aspect of them. For in this particular book we have not so much to criticise as to show how out of the rather unusual material of a road he has contrived to get together such a fascinating volume. It is then first of all of the general consideration of the Roman Road that we have to write.

"The material evidences of our common Roman foundation are, in some departments of them, better preserved in the province of Britain than in any other part of the Imperial West. And these are particularly *roads*." And Belloc not perhaps agreeing with all historians who attribute the power of Rome to her soldiers or her laws has it that the very framework of the Imperial Power of Rome was due to her roads. On this assumption of history we have no wish to disagree, rather from the particular to the general we would go further and suggest that the political or material greatness of any nation has depended upon, and will in the future depend upon, the construction and efficiency

of roads. Of the multifold usefulness and importance of the Roman road Belloc himself shall be made to speak. "To establish" he says "in anything like completeness the scheme of roads in a Roman province is to apprehend the physical basis upon which rested that old centralised Imperial power to which the desperate survival of Europe clung. It is further to comprehend the relationship of town with town of garrison with garrison, and of bishopric with bishopric. It is an explanation of the passage of armies, of commerce and of ideas, for just over one thousand years. The advance of a language or its retreat, the rise and the decline of a market, the barriers that could be set against invasion, the propagation of the Faith, the communication of disaster or revival all these things are understandable when the Imperial scheme of roads is understood and the whole business of the Dark Ages during which our civilisation melted down as it were to recrystallise in the Middle Ages is, on its material side, explicable by a reference to the Roman military ways." Enough to give us some idea of the importance the Roman road had for the subject of this study, enough for us to realise that there is history to be learnt as well as Romance and Old England in the Stane Street, enough to make us pause next time we roll in our cars down to Eastgate, Chichester, enough to make us realise that the road upon which we travel has much to do with that incursion of learning and law from the Roman Empire which

gave to Britain the power to become a great nation. But it is time that we turned to contemplate The Line of the Stane Street.

It might be an interesting question to ask a dozen average Englishmen and Englishwomen what they knew of the Stane Street. It would very probably reveal to us the appalling ignorance of the Englishman of his own country an ignorance that is by no means the monopoly of the so called uneducated person by which we mean the person who can hoe potatoes but cannot do the rule of three. But of all ignorance there is none to-day that is perhaps so gross as that dealing with any kind of geography, no school thinks that it is necessary to teach the map of the world beyond the chief rivers and capes, many women and many men would have no idea as to whether a town was in Sussex or Somerset and many would not realise that the difference of the position was of much consequence. It is then a good lesson in geography to study the line of the Stane Street as picked out by Belloc. Whether he is accurate or not in his deductions of its course is outside our enquiry, the general line he favours seems to have the weight of research, if he has in places perhaps but scant accord with other students of The Stane Street we must be content that of no subject under the sun is everybody agreed.

According to Belloc the Stane Street was built with but one purpose in view, that of its use as a military way. From this it is not difficult to see why the Street should run direct



with no thought of passing near or through inhabited centres, it was "a marching road."

And we are told that it starts from East Gate Chichester, one of the extremities of perhaps the most delightful town in Sussex and ends at the southern end of London Bridge. The reason we discover that it should start from Chichester was that it was the nearest town to Southampton.

We must now turn to the character and history of the Street. With regard to the former we have no need to linger, Belloc is I think certainly right in his assumption that it was entirely with a view to military operations that the road was made, the nature of the road, the direct line of it from point to point, the absolute disregard for passing towns point that it was not an ordinary highway. As to the history of this most fascinating highway it is for Belloc to speak, there are those who do not agree with his position, from internal and external evidences they come to different conclusions, it is impossible to go into the matter in this chapter, it is our business to see what is Belloc's position with regard to the history of the Stane Street.

Of the Stane Street it is evidently very difficult for the historian to gather information for there is little record of incidents connected with it. The historian then has to fall back on the remains of the Street itself and by analogy of other Roman Roads. It is by this somewhat speculative method that Mr. Belloc writes of the history of the Street. From the question of the battle of

Ockley Belloc thinks that it is probable that the Street was used as late as the ninth century. But there does not seem to be any evidence at all as to the latest date that the whole length from Chichester to London Bridge was used. Of the date of its construction Belloc deducts that as direct administration from Rome ceased in Britain with the first years of the fifth century, it is obvious that it must have been constructed sometime in the first four centuries. But he is inclined to think that its construction could not have been earlier than after the work of Agricola in 85 A.D. I am not in entire agreement with this I cannot see that it could not have been constructed in the first few years after Christ.

The whole matter is one of conjecture and the date of construction is not of paramount importance, the fact that it *was* a Roman military road has been well established, it is not necessary to go much further. For those who are of an antiquarian turn of mind the actual year of construction may be a problem they would wish to solve but wisely Belloc leaves a large margin in the period he selects for the beginning of the road. But as a personal matter I would place the beginning of the road any time between about 25 A.D. and the beginning of the fifth century.

It is not possible to follow the matter of the history of the road further, Belloc has taken immense care in getting his matter together and he is just as likely to be right as those who differing from him think they are right and he is wrong.

The question of the Modern Divergences of the Street must be looked at. It is an interesting problem.

With regard to these Belloc commenting on the importance of the question writes "The Stane Street ceased to be a continuous means of communication between Chichester and London at a date which, although as we have seen, it cannot be precisely established, was certainly so early that any prominent example of divergence in its course is an important indication of the influences which moulded travel in the Dark Ages, for the divergences from the Stane Street are concerned only with the disjointed fragments of the road, as those fragments were left after its continuous use was interrupted and after it had sunk into a series of isolated links connecting, not London and the sea coast but neighbouring points in any one countryside." Nothing perhaps could so indicate the position of a road in the history of a country as the growth of side tracks from the main, they indicate population, they indicate a wider love of travel, they indicate points when old systems give place to new. In the case of the Stane Street they give us the certainty that when the Street ceased to be a military way exclusively, divergences arose and the road became of use to the civilian. Hence the importance of divergence in not only history but also in questions of such geographical importance as the growth and position of towns.

That the divergences of the Stane Street in



### *Mr. Belloc and Sussex*

modern times are great is easily ascertainable from Belloc's carefully worked out chapter on the matter. The causes according to him for these divergences were three; firstly, the gradual breakdown of the original surface, secondly, the total breach of continuity when a bridge broke or a causeway had been swallowed up, thirdly, the encroachments which private interests made upon the natural way. All of which go to show I think that Belloc is correct in his assumption that the divergences from the main Street were *Natural*.

The Stane Street is a book that has behind it a love of Romance, a love of Sussex, a respect for history, a lively regard for the causes that make geography. Not all as I have said agree with Belloc with regard to the Stane Street. I do not think he allows a sufficient margin of years for the beginnings of the road, with rather slender material he is inclined to dogmatise. But when all is said and done the Stane Street far away in the centuries when it led the way for the Roman Armies as they tramped through Sussex, has been the cause of one of the most fascinating books Belloc has written. Still in Sussex we now see him in a different mood and the result is "The Four Men."

One of the most insoluble and perplexing problems life offers is that no one really on any given subject thinks exactly alike. No man perhaps quite thinks of God as another man does, no man perhaps thinks of a field quite as another man does. The theologian may think

of God as a Person bound up with certain attributes, the philosopher may think of Him as a force directing the Universe, the poet may think of Him as the expression of all that is beautiful in nature, the poor man may think of Him as a benefactor, the rich man may think of Him as something that is essentially opposed to his worldly ideas, the woman may think of Him in terms of parentage, or the thief may think of Him in terms of hatred or fear. Again one man may think of a field as an open space, another may think of it as a spot where can be grown farm produce, another may think of it as an ideal site upon which to raise an embryo town. Whether we deal with God or a field we can never hope to get any agreement from the majority, we can never hope to get a universal opinion. Whether if we could, the result would be good is another question that is too philosophical to be discussed. I have once again digressed in order to get at the starting point of my thought about "The Four Men." "The Four Men" is a book on Sussex of an imaginary kind, it is really a discussion between four men, a philosopher called Grizzlebeard a poet, a sailor and the writer of the book called, Myself. They meet together somewhat mysteriously and decide to walk through Sussex down to the Arun. It is on this walk that they discuss each with a different point of view various questions.

A dear delightful company the four are as they tramp through Sussex, as they stop at the wayside inn, as they encounter the gloomy morose

rich man, we, too are sad as on their last day they part for ever and the three disappear into the mist while Myself goes home. No criticism is necessary to this most delightful of grown-up fairy tales, it is a profound book, it is a mystical book, it is a pure book, it has a charm that speaks of the country side and the glory of chance acquaintanceship. I must quote but one passage and it shall be that one which I would ask every worldly man and woman to put over their beds. I would ask them to read it when the world is hard, I would ask them to read it when they think that humanity is vile, I would ask them to read it once every week, I would ask them to read it to those who are just beginning life, to those who are nearly ending it, I would ask them to see that it is side by side with that most exquisite saying of Robert Louis Stevenson which asks that any good may be done because (words that we always try to ignore) "I shall not pass by this way again." The passage deals with that awful state that man can come to; the loss of human affection. It shall be quoted at length.

The four are discussing what is the worst thing in the world and death suggested, is dismissed with ignominy.

*Grizzlebeard.*

"You are both of you talking like children. The passing of human affection is the worst thing in the world. When our friends die they go from us, but it is not of their own will; or if it is of their own will it is not of their



own will in any contradiction to ours ; or even if it be of their own will in contradiction to ours and the end of a quarrel, yet it is a violent thing and still savours of affection. But that decay of what is living in the heart and that numbness supervening and that last indifference—oh these are not to be compared for unhappiness with any other ill on this unhappy earth. And all day long and in every place, if you could survey the world from a height and look down into the hearts of men you would see that frost stealing on.

*Myself.*

Is this a thing that happens, Grizzlebeard, more notably to the old ?

*Grizzlebeard.*

No. The old are used to it. They know it but it is not notable to them, It is notable on the approach of middle age. When the enthusiasms of youth have grown either stale or divergent and when in the infinite opportunities which time affords there has been opportunity for difference between friend and friend, then does the evil appear. The early years of a man's life do not commonly breed this accident. So convinced are we then and of such energy in the pursuit of our goal, that if we must separate we part briskly each certain that the other is guilty of a great wrong. And unless communion be closely maintained affection decays.

*The Poet.*

The great poets, Grizzlebeard, never would admit this thing. They have never sung or

deplored the passage of human affection ; they have sung of love turned to hate and of passion, and of rage and of the calm that succeeds passion and of the doubt of the soul and of doom but never of the evil of which you speak.

*The Sailor.*

That was because the evil was too dull as I confess I find it. Anything duller than the loss of a friend. Why it is like writing a poem on boredom ; or like singing a song about Welbeck Street to try and poetise such things. Turn rather to this fire which is beginning to blaze, thank God turn to it and expect the morning.

*Grizzlebeard.*

The reason that the great poets have touched so little upon this thing is precisely because it is the worst thing in the world. It is the spur to no good deed, nor to any strong thinking nor does it in any way amend the mind. It has not even horror nor doom to enhance it, it is an end without fruition. It is an end which leaves no questions and no quest. It is an end without adventure, an end complete, a nothingness ; and there is no matter for art in the mortal hunger of the soul."

Belloc has perhaps given us some of his best work on Sussex. It is strange how the love for a particular bit of country is the inspiration of much great literary work, Hardy with Dorsetshire, Eden Philpotts with Devonshire, Belloc with Sussex. Belloc reverences Sussex as we always reverence something that is

beautiful and unchanging ; yet he hints at the time when Sussex as it is, shall be no more. Commerce and manufacture are slowly but surely creeping in and destroying the countryside, but let those who would live by money getting beware lest in gaining the world they do not lose their souls, the day will surely never come when man is not better for the broad sweep of the hills, when he is not refreshed by the open road, when at the end of the day he does not care to watch the sun sink far away behind a pillar of fire, casting its reflection over an expanse of quiet English countryside. If such a day should come that man lives by commerce alone, may we in the mercy of God be away that we may not see this terrible thing.



## *Chapter Eight*

### SOME OTHER BOOKS AND VERSES

A VERY frequent criticism that is brought against Belloc is one that remarks somewhat sharply that he writes a great many too many books on a great many too many subjects. He is accused of wishing to have a say in everything, rather in the way Mr. Chesterton does, rather in the way Mr. Wells does, rather in the way Mr. Bernard Shaw does. Now I think all these very great (No I will not alter the word to even please those who say the Georgians are small men) men have at least one thing in common, that is that they must have a say in everything that goes on and particularly so, when they know least about it, which certainly gives the four a very firm standing as journalists. For the essence of journalism is to write learnedly about anything you don't happen to know much about with the hope that the public which knows still less will not find out, with the hope that the thing written about will not turn round and protest, this is not so. But to come back to Belloc; in his infant days as a writer of verse, when he was not known enough to ever write bad verse,

Mr. Chesterton wrote a line or two about the apparent fact that Belloc wrote all different kinds of books and apparently did not seem to think it mattered.

At any rate Belloc is, (as is I hope obvious long before this) a writer of various books. Not wishing to anticipate the next chapter in which I shall endeavour to sum up Belloc as he is to-day I will turn to the scope of this chapter. In this one I wish to take a few of Belloc's books at random and a few of his verses with the sole motive of proving that what I hold firmly is true, that as the word "unique" applies to Mr. Chesterton, as "mysticism" applies to Sir J. M. Barrie, as "legality" applies to Mr. Galsworthy, "as prophecy applies" to Mr. Wells, to Mr. Belloc applies the word *versatility*. Which I think is to say that though he writes different kinds of books, he writes all well, as we do not commonly apply the word "versatility" to men who do a number of things badly, conceit is a much more popular word. In this chapter with regard to his prose works I shall deal with his book "Paris," his "Sketch of the European War," his "Path to Rome," his "Warfare in England." and some of his early verses. It may be brought against me that I have neglected Belloc as a novelist.

As a novelist I cannot say that I think Belloc is likely to find at all a high place, the successful writer of Essays and Histories is seldom the successful novelist. The successful novelist is better not to be a literary man in the

sense of a man who loves literature, it is better that he should write not with one eye on immortality, but with both eyes on the mass public that will tolerate nothing except the daily newspaper and the novel. Belloc is never a "cheap" writer, I cannot imagine him being read by the girl at the seaside during the moments she is not looking out for a flirtation, I cannot imagine Belloc to be read as a novelist even as much as Mr. Chesterton, who is a clever eccentric fiction writer, I can only imagine Belloc being read as a novelist by those people who happen to pick up one of his novels and do not demand that the book shall be all that a novel should be. Having therefore many other books upon which I have had to write I must ask those readers who may feel aggrieved that I have dismissed Belloc as a novelist in a few lines, to know that I do not think he is worth more. Rather with no regrets for such summary treatment I will away to the continent and see Belloc in the great city of Paris.

Probably not five per cent. of the English people know anything about the history of Paris; beyond perhaps vaguely knowing that it had an exciting and glorious career in the French Revolution and an equally exciting but inglorious career in the war of 1870. Besides this lamentable ignorance of the chief city of France, Paris to the popular (and therefore somewhat vulgar) imagination is a city that is merely one of uproarious pleasure and bohemianism. The



bank clerk tired of the city, possibly also tired of his commonplace wife sees Paris as a medley of night life and jaded women, the tired society folk of Mayfair look upon it as a stepping stone to the Riviera, the schoolgirl looks upon it as a place in which to go to school to learn French with the firm intention of speaking as much English as possible, the schoolmistress looks upon it as a city that will enable her to say to her less fortunate friends that she has travelled on the Continent. Paris is hardly ever taken seriously, it is thought of as the gay city, or the city where it is quite fashionable to be slightly indiscreet. Such an impression has been largely brought about by the influence of the stage which when it can think of nothing original must pour out "wit" about Paris, it has been brought about by the fact that never by any chance do the schools think it necessary to teach their pupils anything about its history, it has been brought about by the popular idea that Paris is a kind of huge exhibition simply there as a pleasure city for tourists. It is therefore indeed admirable that Belloc should have written such a brilliant and serious book as his *History of Paris*. If the city of Paris is a gay city, if it boasts of an easy bohemianism (and not the miserable make-believe that London with its sordid night clubs tries to achieve) if it strolls about as though time *did* wait for man, at least let it not be forgotten that Paris for many centuries has watched the passage of time, has had its dark days and has not too easily

remained the capital of the great French nation.

Belloc is very emphatic that Paris has been always in the nature of a city state in the Greek sense of an ordered and self-supporting community. "In the first place" he says "Paris is, and has known itself to be, the City State of modern Europe." The result is that Paris has been able to act together "Paris acts together ; its citizens think of it perpetually as of a kind of native country, and it has established for itself a definition which makes it the brain of that sluggish body, the peasantry of France."

I cannot do more than indicate the scope of this great and scholarly work on Paris. It gives us an intimate and I believe accurate picture of the life of Paris during the long years it has been a great city. We see Paris in the Dark Ages, just after the city of Rome had fallen into decay and Paris seems likely to fall as well, but there is a personality and "a sudden halt is given by Charlemagne." And so on through the long and wearisome early and later Middle Ages, a period of varying fortunes with a gradual upward trend to the period of The Renaissance. It was a period of the building of great edifices with an insweep of culture from the land of Italy. Then down to the eighteenth century at which Belloc ends his book with the inauguration of the new government of Paris on the 13th of July in 1789.

As though in contrast to French History on which probably Belloc is the most profound scholar to-day I come to his work on The Great

War. I know it is somewhat fashionable to laugh at Belloc and his war prophecies as always being right *after* the event yet the fact remains that in many ways he was singularly right. There are few if any men who so understand the military side of history as Belloc, it is obvious from his masterly survey of the military aspect of The French Revolution. The two volumes I am writing of concern the progress of the War to the battle of the Marne. They are written with astonishing detail.

Yet I do not think that ten people in every hundred to-day would read them. It is a perfectly astonishing fact how little interest we have in wars that are past, even one of such magnitude as the one that beat Germany but did not mean much of a victory for us. Of course to the student who wants to know exactly what took place, why it took place, why such and such an expected conclusion was not arrived at, why the Germans failed to take a decisive victory in the early days of the war, cannot do better than study carefully what Belloc writes about it. But for the general reader who prefers that he shall learn of the War through pictures or graphic description, probably inaccurate, who prefers to read of startling deeds of valour, who prefers a not too intimate description of the field of battle, of the expected results, of what really happened, it would obviously be disappointing for him to read Belloc. His sketch of the early part of the war is distinctly for the student, though I believe



Belloc had in mind the general reader. But for once his grasp of the psychological attitude of the general reader is at fault ; the average person to-day would not spend one hour a week in reading of the Great War, rather he would be more likely to resent that he should be asked to do so. In the multitude that has been written of the War from history by vacillating politicians to poetry by emotional and sometimes poetical poets ; no doubt there could not be found a more detailed account of the early part than that written by the subject of this study ; it follows the moves of the opposing parties with the precision of a game of chess, it gets at the causes behind, it does not hesitate to criticise and the book has undoubtedly earned for the author (as any book worth writing should) much unpopularity. Yet although I am not hopeful, I wish that the book might become popular in the sense of being widely read ; the callous indifference in England to the War is apparent to-day. The shamefaced attempt to dismiss the subject from all our literature, the contemptuous treatment of those who took part in it, the political backbiting and disparagement of those who cannot defend themselves (to wit the gross and cowardly political and press attacks on Lord Kitchener) all tend to make it quite evident that our good intentions during the War, our pious use of Religion, our ridiculous worship of soldiers and sailors, had but one motive—we were very much afraid and a man who is afraid is always full of the noblest desires and inten-

tions, the behaviour of William Rufus when he thought his miserable soul was about to depart from this earth, is not a bad example. It is not out of place having considered Belloc as the writer of the military history of a particular war to consider him when he writes of war in this country from a general standpoint. I have therefore left his "Warfare in England" until now.

I have already said, citing a particular example of the Great War, that there is in this country generally speaking a lack of interest in the past history of warfare. Two reasons may be given for this, the one that it is many hundred years since there was any serious fighting in this land; the other that we have the good fortune to be an island. To these two I may add a more general reason that very little of interest is taught us about our wars. We may learn at school, that we had a habit of fighting with Wales and Scotland, we may vaguely know that there were great battles at Bannockburn and say Marston Moor, but of the general topography of England which has determined the trend of warfare in this country, the schoolboy is taught nothing. Consequently when he grows up, he takes no interest in the past warfare of this country and tends to look upon battles as something that had to be known something about, if he wished at four o'clock to take part in the practice at the nets. But in no conceivable sense are we a military nation, in fact the Englishman is apt to think of the military side of the Nation as being essentially snobbish. It is then a good

thing that Belloc should have written a book on the conditions and history of warfare in England. Much of his book before describing the various campaigns that have taken place, is given to the topography of England and how it has determined the course of war.

Perhaps the most arresting part of the whole book is that part which deals with the peculiar military history of London. It is of that strange fact that after the eleventh century London has never been besieged or taken by a hostile army. Why is this so? Belloc shall supply the answer. "In the first place" he says "London always had and continues to have a numerical position of an extraordinary kind. It accounts to-day for something like a sixth of the population. It has often in the past accounted for a similar proportion of the population of its day. This feature alone would give it in the story of English campaigning a position quite different from that occupied by Paris let us say in the north of France, or Lyons in the south." But there was another very potent fact in its favour, and it was and is the river. "The river was too broad to be blocked for long and it could always furnish supplies." At this point I shall indulge upon a slight digression to ask the question could London to-day be said to be safe from the risk of conquest in case of war? Now I hold firmly that there is but one danger to London and that is from the air. But I do not think that this danger is likely to assume more danger than large air raids with a subsequent loss of



life, damage to property and the more dangerous possibility of a loss of popular confidence. The risk of the "landing" of an army from the air seems to me to be at present infinitesimal; any aeroplane would be shot to pieces long before it came anywhere near to landing. London then I think still may look to an immunity from invasion though it must expect in future wars a good deal of "worry" from the air.

With the rest of Belloc's book we need not tarry, it is an intimate account of the various wars from the Norman Conquest down to the Scotch Wars and it is of the utmost value to the student who wishes to understand not only the military history of this country, but the political and civil history also.

Once again I must turn to Belloc in a totally different state of mind, when he wrote that most famous book "The Path To Rome." There are probably few who at all love antiquity and history who have not had a longing to go to Rome. They may have first felt it when as youngsters they read of Nero, they may have again felt it when in later years all that Rome has meant to the world is apparent, they may have again felt it when old age is creeping on, that at least *once* they would have liked to set foot in the Eternal City. There is a fascination about the idea of going to Rome that can only be explained by the fact that Rome is a symbol of the greatness of man and alas also of his smallness, it is a reminder that kingdoms do pass away, that even the greatest nations are not permanent, that there is in the word Rome some

strange mystical meaning that is beyond the explanation of man, there is in the word something of the Divine.

"The Path To Rome" is though when all is said and done but a book of travel, it is an account of a walk from the valley of the Moselle to the outer gates of the City of Rome. Wherein lies the charm of the book? It is that such a journey conjures up many thoughts in the mind of the traveller. It is when the night is falling and we are travelling alone that the mind works easily, it is when we awake with the morning sun breaking over the hills that we think great thoughts. This book of Belloc's might easily be but a notebook of thoughts about this that and the other, but it is perhaps something more, it is in the nature of a solemn pilgrimage, not to Mecca but to the Christian Mecca, Rome. It is a book that can be read again and again, it is a reproach to us who think that we really know what travel is when we go by Pullman Car and sleep in a luxurious bed. To travel we must walk, we must sleep under the hedgerow, we must converse with those we meet once, never to see them again, we must at night sit by the little fire of embers with only the whisper of the night wind for company, with only bread and bacon and perhaps if we are lucky, beer for supper. It is of this kind of pilgrimage that Belloc describes in his "Path to Rome." It is a journey that goes through the valleys, across the mountains, has long lonely nights, has the joy of the coming of the dawn, has its moments

of terror on the mountain, has its moments when the shelter of a cottage would be Paradise and above all it has at the end the coming to the city of Rome. It is undoubtedly one of Belloc's most popular and fascinating books.

There is unfortunately not very much to say about Belloc as a poet. What he has written are mainly satirical and humorous verses, especially in his famous "Bad Child's Book of Beasts" which are admirable. But with the few other verses and sonnets that he has given we are forced to say that it is not really possible to criticize Belloc as a poet. Yet it is I think a mistake that he does not write more verse, it is a mistake that he allows it to take such a back place in his literary output. Poets to-day though numerous in number are sadly few in matter of quality. The poets of to-day may be counted upon one hand, to wit Mr. Chesterton, Mr. Walter de la Mare, Mr. Masefield, Mr. Squire and Mr. Laurance Binyon.

I would then suggest to Belloc that he might write more poetry. Of his other books I can only mention them. Two admirable books indeed has he written on the River Thames, that river which never seems to lack something to write about. Very recently Belloc has published another very pleasant book of essays with the quaintly original title "ON" and they are "On" many kind of things.

It is not too much to hope perhaps that Belloc will make an effort and give us a book of real poetry, he can do it and it might be one of his greatest books.



## *Chapter Nine*

### MR. BELLOC TO-DAY

**I**T would be quite unfashionable in such a book as this not to have a chapter on the present position of the subject written about. The time will soon come when it will be a part of daily journalism, every ten years or so to write an article on the present position of public men and women. Thus we may expect to find an article in years to come regretting that the then Bishop of London since we last wrote had acquired a double chin and terrible tendencies to a love of incense, the following week we might find an article deploring the fact that the Prime Minister departing from his original custom showed a marked liking for eggs without bacon for breakfast ; again in the same journal we should not be disturbed to read that at the present moment Miss Geraldine Catchon of the Frivolity Theatre was of the opinion that divorce by becoming so easy was making it increasingly difficult for actresses to obtain notoriety, once more we should not be worried to read that the popular author X lately so well known for his brilliant sex novels was to-day convinced the amount of sex written of in novels was likely to lead to loose thinking.

If I therefore neglected to write something of what Belloc is to-day, I should be, as a member of the press, somewhat of a traitor though really it is the most difficult thing in the world to write of the position of such a man as Belloc. For we are bound to ask what is he known as? is it as a writer of history, is it as a politician, is it as an Essayist, is it as a theologian or is it as a traveller? I shall suggest that to-day Belloc is known firstly as a politician, and secondly as a writer. And I would at once warn him that if he is to retain any permanent place in the world of letters he must at once reverse the positions. For reputations that are made in politics are temporary, but reputations that are made in letters if they are of any magnitude, are likely to be at least more lasting if not permanent. I fear that much the same criticism applies to Mr. Chesterton, he is very quickly becoming a supporter or opponent of causes, whereas his proper function is without any doubt as a poet.

I am aware that many will say, that as a writer Belloc has already made so firm a mark that nothing can dislodge him from it. With this I do not propose to disagree, but I am merely saying that to-day many people look upon him first and foremost as a politician. And as a politician he is I think singularly ill informed, his attitude to the Jews is so ridiculous, so contemptuous, that had it been the opinion of a less eminent man, it would not have been worth serious thought. His whole anti-Jewish propaganda is

really a policy dictated by the political ambitions of the Catholic Church, that Church of which so much is alas a forgetfulness of its Spiritual functions.

To-day Belloc is vastly concerned with the trend of the modern press, and as I have said in the first chapter of this book he sighs for The Free Press, in which without any checking he would be able to say exactly what he wanted to say. Only lately he has become Editor of a new paper and whether he will make it a success remains to be seen ; in no sense can Belloc be called a journalist, he has far too many fixed opinions, but all successful Editors are not by any means always journalists in the strict sense of the term.

Religion is of course to a certain extent a private matter but in the case of Belloc it is something more. Possibly as I have said all his political outlook is based on the dictates of the Catholic Church. He naturally wishes to see a return to the Catholic Faith throughout England and Europe, such a state it is obvious cannot be attained without a vast political turn over. If as I hold that the man of letters is seldom a successful novelist, it is still more seldom that a man of letters is a successful politician and Belloc is a very unsuccessful politician. He has a fatal inability to see the other side, he mixes up a bitterness and wish to better things in a startling manner, while considering that as an effective body the House of Commons is ceasing to function, he spends



much time in talking about that House as though it was a power (if an evil power) in this country.

Belloc had much better realise before he is much older that politics are not his mark and would he also tell Mr. Chesterton that the same applies to him and would he whisper it to Mr. Wells?

What is the position of Belloc to-day as an historian? It is not easy to say. Belloc writes of history from the Catholic standpoint, and it is a standpoint that has a good deal to be said for it, but in the case of the subject of this study, it has led him to a rather one-sided outlook, though not so one-sided as one might expect. As the Catholic Church is very largely dependent on a twisted reading of history for much of its existence, it is not surprising that a member of that Church should be led into errors of judgment. Thus Belloc's attitude to the Reformation is unfair, misleading. There is a Catholic side to that controversy, there is a Protestant side, there are points where the Catholics are wrong, there are points where the Protestants are wrong. But while admitting that the cause of the Reformation was the decay into which the Catholic Church had fallen, Belloc is entirely unable to give to his opponents even honesty. For the reformers were in many respects honest, and many Catholics (not Mr. Belloc) realise that the Reformation although it made another Church did by its appearance put the Catholic Church on its mettle when it was fast becoming so debased that a destruction

of it seemed well nigh inevitable, if we admit that a Church can really ever be destroyed. The Catholic standpoint of Belloc on the other hand with regard to the French Revolution I have no quarrel with, his work on that great cataclysm is without a shadow of doubt his most important work. It is so great that no words can do it justice, it would be impossible to-day to find a more intimate account of the Revolution. It views the conflict from the French side, it is I think a vastly superior work to that of Carlyle. Belloc's lives of Danton and Robespierre are to-day acknowledged standard works on those great men. Every schoolboy who wishes to understand the French Revolution should be made to read him on it, he should be made to read the lives of those two great men who were so complex, Danton the oratorical politician, Robespierre the priestly philosopher who could and did become a dreaded tyrant but not perhaps entirely of his own will. As a historian of the French Revolution Belloc has no superior, he has probably no equal, it is on this work that he will earn the word so few men really deserve, great.

And yet I have not discussed the question what is the place of Belloc in literature to-day? In my book on Mr. Chesterton I said that the word "Unique" perhaps best described him, many of those who so kindly reviewed my book agreed with me. Is there any word that describes Belloc? And I am only thinking of his really literary works, his books of Essays,

his delightful phantasy of Sussex and his remarkable description of a walk to Rome. Shall I be very wrong if I use the word "Romantic"? For is not the word something that describes the man who sees something not only in the things that are far off, but are near at hand. Is it not Romance that makes Belloc love Sussex, is it not Romance that makes him on the top of a bus in Oxford Street meditate upon the destiny of the soul, is it not Romance that makes him revel in the discomforts and dangers of a walk from France to the gate of Rome?

And if I am right in my suggestion that Belloc to-day may be termed a Romantic writer then is he really a great writer. For we are very sadly to-day in need of Romantic writers, we are tired of merely analytical fiction, we have had our share of sex, we do not want too much mere sickly sentiment. We need very much a return to Romance that state that is perhaps almost at its best in the Fairy Tale.

Romance is a thing that cares not for money, it can be found on our own doorstep, it is not shut in by four walls, it is not dependent upon distance, it inspires the purest writing, it is the brother of the rising sun, it is the sister of the stars, it is the friend of the moon, it comes to the millionaire, it comes to the newspaper seller at the windy corner of the street, it kisses us when we are pleased, it caresses us when we are sad, it has its moods, it can be gay, it can be melancholy, it can guide us through life, it can help us at death, it is of this world, yet not of this



world, it is that which makes men write. It is therefore in goodly company that Belloc moves if we admit in his literary works he is a Romantic writer.

Belloc has a certain style that is distinctly attractive, yet he is not free from mannerisms. His style is quite evidently not studied, it is perfectly natural. His public is a wide one, but it is the thinking public that does not read with the sole intention of being amused. He is probably in some respects a better writer of English than either Mr. Chesterton or Mr. Wells, but he has not the attractive personality of either of them.

As a poet of course his output has been so small that it is quite out of the question to say whether he is a good one or not. But what he has written shows promise that if he wrote more poetry, he might become a poet, even in these days when poetry is anything from Browning or Swinburne, to ecstasies by enthusiastic females in cheap and trashy magazines. But of course if as a poet we compare him to Chesterton, he has not a look in. Whether Belloc is likely to write better than he has done is I think extremely improbable, his best work is probably done and the man who has not got his best work written by the time he is fifty must look sharp. That he has a place amongst the immortals is certain enough, but it will probably be more as an historian than a man of letters. Because there is in his purely literary works, besides their Romantic element, something

that is rather ephemeral, rather topical, rather (although I hold in no sense is Belloc anything of a journalist) journalistic. Such work cannot expect to endure for ever, and it is not because of any shortcoming that this is so, it is that the day may come for instance when Sussex will no longer be a delightful county of hills and valleys but a smoking furnace of the products of commerce. But the day will surely never come when there will not be some who will wish to read of the French Revolution. It is then as an historian that Belloc will probably achieve lasting fame.

Has Belloc any gift of humour? To a certain extent but it is not very spontaneous or glowing. It is more of a satirical nature, in much more abundance has he the gift of pathos. Like Chesterton, I do not think he would be happy in writing an ordinary sort of novel, he has not the power of describing ordinary people, perhaps one of the hardest tasks a writer can set himself. It is a mistake to look down on what is commonly called fiction, which is usually the description of the lives and worries of rather commonplace people, such writing is not easy, and neither Chesterton or Belloc seem able to do it. They have not the remarkable gift of Mr. Wells for this kind of work. I do not think that Belloc could describe a woman with any marked success neither can Mr. Chesterton, few writers can describe a woman for the very good reason that the feminine sex is quite indescribable.

. . . . .

To-day then Belloc is first and foremost known as a politician or perhaps a political writer. His fame will probably come from his histories. As a writer of Essays and travels he is one of the most delightful of the day, but it is not very probable that they will have a very permanent place, though I think that there will probably always be certain people who would wish to read them. As a student of the Great War, Belloc made a good many mistakes but he said a good deal that was right. As a Catholic Belloc is quite adamant, he sees in the Catholic Faith the sole hope for the world. We shall not dispute the world's need of a body of Catholic Truth, but we strongly dispute that as the Catholic Church is to-day that it is anything more than a political and in many ways utterly unspiritual body.

Belloc is a man of middle age, he has done great things but if he is to retain a place amongst the great he must cease interfering with politics and turn to the better and nobler task of writing more books on "Everything" except questions that do not concern him.



## *Chapter Ten*

### LET US NOW RING DOWN THE CURTAIN

THE best book, the worst book, the good book, the bad book have this in common that sooner or later they must come to an end. The end of anything has a certain amount of pathos about it, the end of life is a melancholy if it is a hopeful thing, the end of a journey though it may lead to joy is seldom not regretted if the journey has been pleasant. The end of the book to the writer may be perhaps a mixed feeling, joy at something done, sadness that there is no more to be said. The reader may be glad to be at the end of a book because he wishes to know what the end is about, he may be sorry to be at the end of the book if its reading has caused him pleasure. The word end has a strange mixture of joy and sadness.

As far as I am concerned this book is finished, it has now but one thing to do, if it accomplishes it, it will have succeeded, if it does not accomplish it then it will have failed, the one thing is that those who read it shall feel at the end of the book Belloc was a man worth writing about. May those who read it have as much pleasure as I have had in writing it. May they read it when

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the sun is high in the heavens, may they read it when the moon peeps out from behind a dark cloud (this they would see if they drew the curtains aside) and when it is read may it not sleep too long on the bookshelf before it resumes its travels.

## PRESS OPINIONS ON "G. K. CHESTERTON"

The book is an achievement. Mr. Braybrooke surveys the main Chesterton works in order. The result of his labours is to interpret Mr. Chesterton to those who know him not and to suggest fresh viewpoints to those who know him well."—*Liverpool Daily Courier*.

Mr. Braybrooke knows Mr. Chesterton and his work well and is one of his keenest admirers, but happily there is nothing fulsome in the book, which if it is an appreciation is also a very discriminating criticism of the work it describes and describes with skill and accuracy."—*Pall Mall Gazette*.

"The volume thoughtfully reviews G. K. C's. literary work. Suggestively investigates the versatility of his personality, and the characteristics that have given him a place in literature happily described by Mr. Braybrooke as unique."—*The Scotsman*.

"Most admirers of Chesterton will have but one opinion regarding this study of him—that it is worthy of G. K. C."—*The Aberdeen Daily Journal*.

"G. K. Chesterton by Patrick Braybrooke is a useful and comprehensive survey of the work of the most prolific and in many senses the most interesting of contemporary writers."—*Mr. Sidney Dark in John of London's Weekly*.

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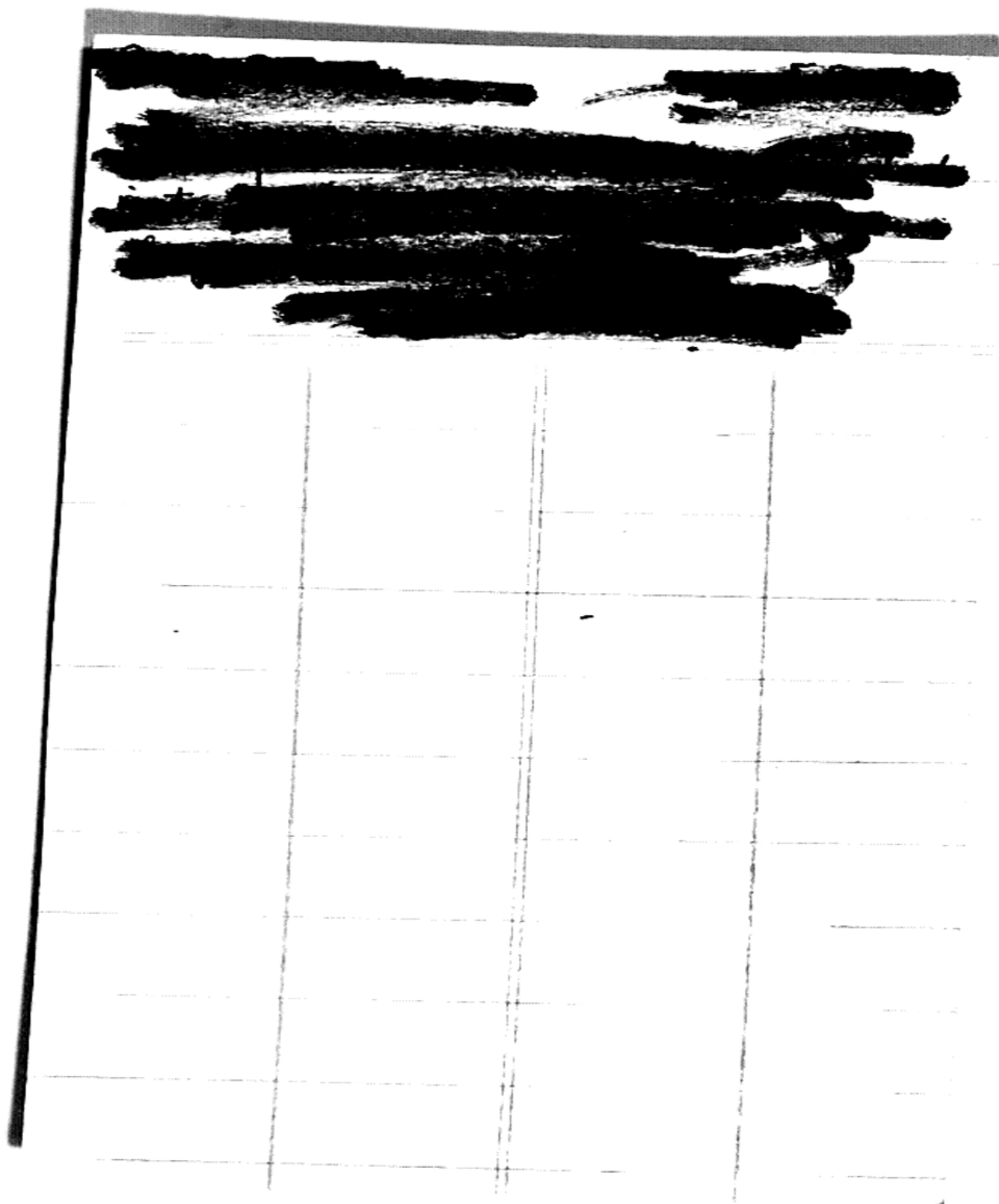
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*In preparation*

JOHN MORLEY

a literary Study

By PATRICK BRAYBROOKE

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